THE STORY OF CHE GUEVARA'S YEAR IN AFRICA
ERNESTO CHE GUEVARA
CONGO DIARY
Episodes of the Revolutionary War in the Congo

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CONGO DIARY

Episodes of the Revolutionary War in the Congo

Ernesto Che Guevara

Foreword by Aleida Guevara March

Centro de Estudios
CHE GUEVARA

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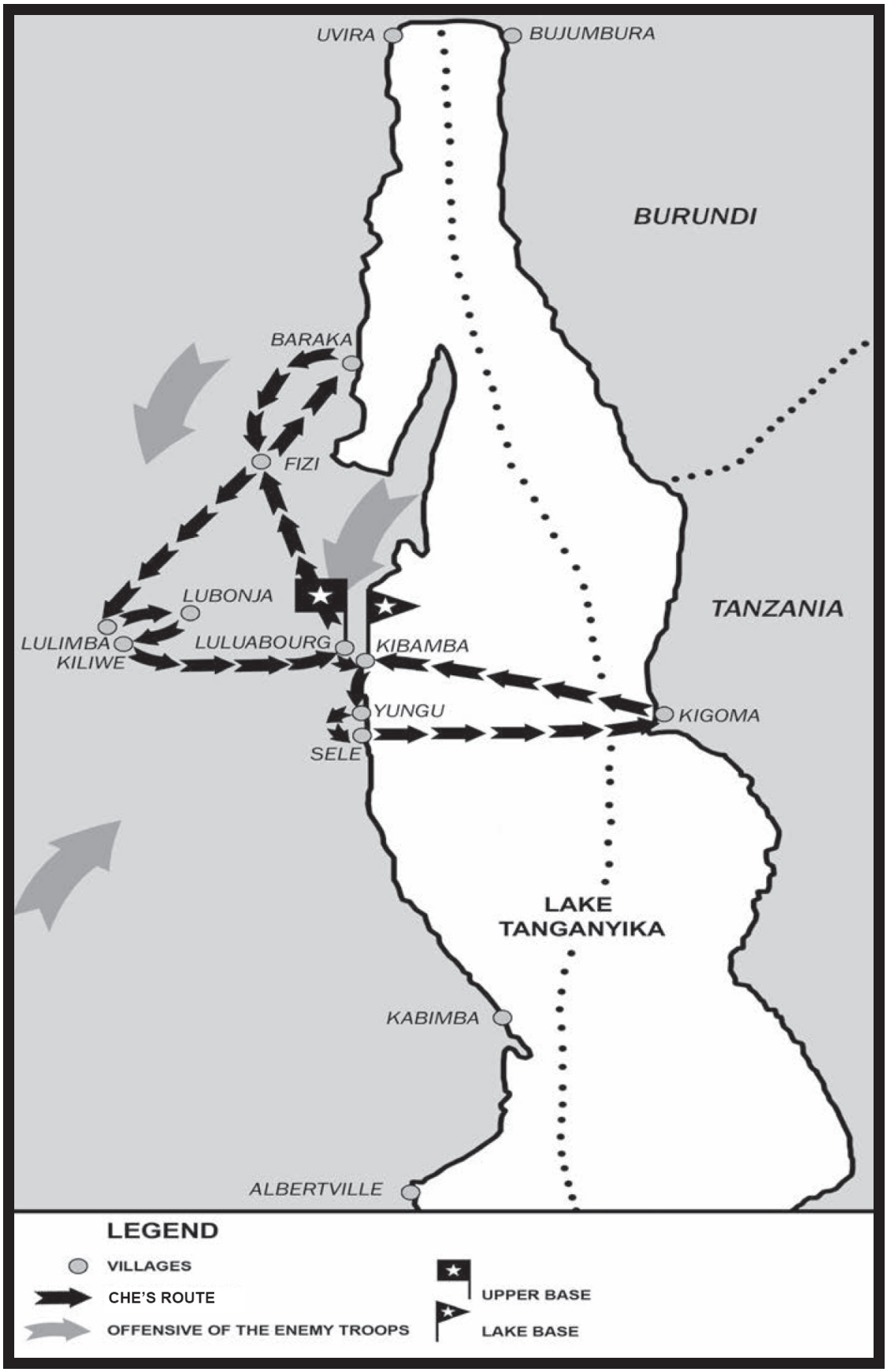
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EDITORS' NOTE

In a letter to his mother, written from Mexico in October of 1956, the young Ernesto Guevara declared that he had decided "to deal with the main things first, to pit myself against the order of things, shield on my arm, the whole fantasy, and then, if the windmills don't break open my head, I'll write." These lines announce the definitive consummation of a change in the young Argentine and point to the future course of his life in which action and reflection, understanding the world and transforming it, would be united in perfect harmony.

Che's famous *Reminiscences of the Cuban Revolutionary War* was a compilation of articles based on his experiences during the two years of guerrilla warfare in Cuba, articles originally published in the magazine *Verde Olivo*.[1] One significant difference between those reminiscences of the Cuban guerrilla war and these written about his experience in the Congo is the position from which he writes: the Cuban revolutionary war ended in victory whereas the struggle in the Congo did not. But that difference reveals a common element, an irrevocable commitment to the strictest adherence to the truth, which Che presents in the prologue to his stories of the Cuban war, as the first and fundamental necessity of someone writing history. And he adds another requirement for the revolutionary: the need to examine not just the victories, but every action.

The analysis in these pages is much sharper than in his writings on the Cuban war and reveals the intellectual maturity of the writer. Moreover, the narration of events here is not just more critical—it is much more self-critical, something that was always characteristic of Che—but without giving in for a single moment to pessimism about the final outcome of the struggle for liberty and justice.

What is now presented is the final product of an extensive revision, in which the support of two of the participants in the struggle proved to be

invaluable. They are medical doctor and commander Oscar Fernández Mell and compañero Marcos A. Herrera Garrido. We want to place on the record, therefore, our gratitude for the time they devoted to this project.

In addition, as part of this same effort to make the text more understandable, some explanatory notes in relation to certain events, circumstances, personalities and ideas have been added. To differentiate these editorial notes added by the editors from those written by Che himself, Che's notes are indicated in the footnotes.

This book now includes a map of the region, essential for achieving a better sense of location on the part of the reader, and the glossary of Swahili names, places and terms that Che prepared as part of this manuscript is included as the first appendix.

Che considered that his participation in the Congolese guerrilla war resulted in the reinitiation of a revolutionary cycle and was the expression of an internationalism consistent with his theses on the liberation of the Third World. As he explains, they were "part of an idea of struggle that was completely organized in my mind." It is a reaffirmation, now in maturity, of that confluence of thought and action that came together ever more tightly throughout his life, culminating in Bolivia, creating and giving special force and meaning to his example.

In these pages the description of the events he lived through are intertwined with analysis from a world perspective. These reflections on imperialist domination and liberation are part of a continuity that flows through his speeches in Geneva, the United Nations and Algeria to his "Message to the Tricontinental." Che's banner is one that calls for action at the service of "the sacred cause of the redemption of humanity."

Che Guevara Studies Center (Havana)

The editors would also like to acknowledge the effort and dedication of Commander Fidel Castro for his detailed revision of this manuscript.

1. Che’s original diary, on which that book was based, has now been published for the first time as *Diary of a Combatant* (Ocean Press, 2012).

CHE GUEVARA IN THE CONGO

Gabriel García Márquez

Nothing illustrates the duration and intensity of the Cuban presence in Africa better than the fact that Che Guevara himself, at the prime of his life and the height of his fame, went off to fight in the guerrilla war in the Congo. He left Cuba on April 25, 1965—the very same day on which he submitted his farewell letter to Fidel Castro, giving up his rank of commander and everything else that legally tied him to the government. He traveled out alone on commercial airlines, under cover of an assumed name and an appearance only slightly altered by two expert touches. His executive case contained works of literature and numerous inhalers to relieve his insatiable asthma; he would while away the dull hours in hotel rooms playing endless games of chess with himself. Some time later, he met up in the Congo with 200 Cuban troops who had traveled from Havana in a ship loaded with arms. The precise object of Che's mission was to train guerrillas for the National Council of the Revolution, which was fighting against Moise Tshombe—that puppet of the former Belgian colonialists and the international mining companies. Patrice Lumumba had been murdered, and although the titular head of the National Council of the Revolution was Gaston Soumialot, the person really in command of operations was Laurent Kabila, based at his Kigoma hideout on the opposite shore of Lake Tanganyika. This situation undoubtedly helped Che Guevara to keep his real identity secret, and for even greater security he did not appear as the principal leader of the mission. That is why he was known by the alias "Tatu," which is the Swahili word for the number three.

Che Guevara remained in the Congo from April to December 1965, not only training guerrillas but leading them into battle and fighting by their side. His personal links with Fidel Castro, which have been the subject of so much speculation, did not weaken at any moment: the two maintained

permanent and friendly contact by means of an excellent communications system.

After Tshombe was overthrown, the Congolese asked the Cubans to withdraw in order to facilitate the conclusion of an armistice. Che left as he had come: without a sound. He took a regular flight to Dar es-Salaam in Tanzania, keeping his head buried in a book of chess problems which he read and re-read throughout the six-hour journey. In the next seat, his Cuban adjutant tried to fend off the political commissar of the Zanzibar army—an old admirer of Che who spoke of him incessantly all the way to Dar es-Salaam, trying to obtain news of him and reiterating his desire to meet him again.

In that fleeting, anonymous passage through Africa, Che Guevara was to sow a seed that no one will destroy. Some of his men went on to Brazzaville, to train guerrilla units for the PAIGC [African Party of the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde] (then led by Amilcar Cabral) and especially for the MPLA. One of these columns later entered Angola in secret and, under the name “Camilo Cienfuegos Column,” joined the struggle against the Portuguese. Another infiltrated into Cabinda and later crossed the river Congo to implant itself in the Dembo region—the birthplace of Agostinho Neto, where the fight against the Portuguese had been going on for five centuries. Thus the recent Cuban aid to Angola [1975–91] resulted not from a passing impulse, but from the consistent policy of the Cuban revolution towards Africa. This time, however, there was a new and dramatic element involved in the delicate Cuban decision. It was no longer a question simply of sending help, but of embarking upon a large-scale regular war, over 10,000 kilometers away, at an incalculable economic and human cost and with many unpredictable political consequences.

FOREWORD

Aleida Guevara March[1]

I was always told that I would have to start one day, but they did not warn me that it could be so difficult. This book was written by a man whom I have respected and greatly admired ever since I became conscious. Unfortunately he is dead, and therefore unable to express his opinion about what I write, and worst of all for us, nor can he explain what he meant to say and whether today, decades after the events described, he would add an explanatory note. This is why I say that my task is extremely difficult. Che's diary from the Congo, which remained unpublished [in English] up to now, was preserved in his personal archive, and is now published with stylistic corrections, the incorporation of various observations and the elimination of a number of notes. This represents a great commitment to this history, because various other versions of this manuscript, based on Che's first transcriptions, have already appeared [in Spanish]. Although he authorized future editors to make whatever changes they thought necessary, we have maintained the complete text that he actually wrote [in 1966] at the end of his mission in the Congo, when he subjected his notes written during the struggle to a deep and critical analysis to make it possible for "experiences to be extracted that might be useful to other revolutionary movements."

In his preface, titled "An Initial Warning," Che begins by saying: "This is the story of a failure." While I don't agree with this assessment, I can understand his state of mind and how it might be considered a failure. But personally I think it was truly heroic. Anyone who has spent any time in the continent of Africa will certainly understand what I am saying. The degradation it has undergone over the centuries at the hands of so-called European colonizers still leaves its mark on the peoples of Africa: the imposition of a different culture, of other religions, the blocking of the

normal development of a civilization, and the exploitation of its natural wealth including the use of its people as slaves, torn from their habitat to be abused and humiliated—all this has deeply marked these human beings. If we consider that it was caused by others who still feel entitled to do such things today, and that in one way or another we allow this to continue, then we can begin to appreciate how people might respond to certain events.

Nevertheless, many people might wonder why Che Guevara participated in this revolutionary process, what motivated him to try and help this movement. It is Che who can best answer this question: “When it comes to Yankee imperialism, it is not enough to be resolute in defense. It has to be attacked in its bases of support in the colonies and neocolonies that are the foundation of its system of world domination.”

Che had always expressed his desire to continue the struggle in other lands. As a doctor by profession and a guerrilla fighter by action, he knew the limitations that life imposes on a human being and the sacrifices demanded by something as hard as guerrilla warfare, so we can understand his desire to transform his dream into reality while he was in the best possible physical condition. We know his deeply rooted sense of responsibility, his political maturity and the commitment he had made to many compañeros who relied on him to continue the struggle.

He had made an earlier trip to Africa where he had the opportunity to meet some of the leaders of the revolutionary movements active at that time, and to familiarize himself with their problems and concerns. He always stayed in touch with Fidel Castro, who, in an unpublished letter dated December 1964, described the measures that were being taken in Cuba at the time.

> Che:
>
> I have just met with Sergio [del Valle] who reported in detail on how everything is going. There doesn’t seem to be any difficulty in carrying out the project. Diocles [Torralba] will give you a detailed verbal report.
>
> We will make the final decision on the plan when you return. To be able to choose from the possible alternatives, it is necessary to

> know the opinion of our friend [Ahmed Ben Bella]. Try to keep us informed by secure means.

It should never be forgotten that the group of Cubans who participated in this mission along with Che shared his conviction: “Our country, the sole socialist bastion on the doorstep of Yankee imperialism, sends its soldiers to fight and die in a foreign land, on a distant continent, and publicly assumes full responsibility for its actions. In this challenge, in this clear position on the great modern-day issue of waging a relentless struggle against Yankee imperialism, lies the heroic significance of our participation in the struggle of the Congo.”

Che and the group he led aimed to strengthen the liberation movement in the Congo, to achieve a united front, to select the best leaders and those prepared to continue the struggle for the final liberation of Africa. He took with him the experience gained in Cuba and placed it at the service of the new revolution.

The harsh realities of the Congo affected Che: its backwardness, the lack of political-ideological development among the people, against which it was necessary to struggle with firmness and determination. There were moments of discouragement and incomprehension, but rising above these adversities, with a prophetic vision, was the enormous confidence and love that he felt for those who decided to create conditions for development and greater dignity for their people.

In Africa, history has been transforming that vision into reality for more than 30 years, as developing education in military matters has become part of revolutionary consciousness. This resulted in such major victories as Cuito Cuanavale [in Angola against the Apartheid forces of South Africa], Ethiopia, Namibia and elsewhere, which have all contributed to the sovereignty and independence of the continent.

The Cuban revolution maintained absolute discretion for as long as possible about Che’s internationalist activity in the Congo, for many months stoically enduring a deluge of slanders. But when the first Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party was announced [in October 1965], by which time Che was already fully engaged in combat in the Congo, it was decided to make public his farewell letter as it was no longer

possible to avoid explaining to the people of Cuba and the world the absence of a man who had been one of the most solid and legendary heroes of the revolution.

In his diary, Che concludes that knowledge of this letter created a rift between himself and the Cuban combatants: “There were some things that we no longer had in common, certain sentiments that I had tacitly or explicitly renounced but which each individual holds most sacred: his family, his surroundings and his homeland.” If this is how he felt, one can imagine how difficult it was for Fidel Castro to get him to return to Cuba. He wrote several times in an attempt to convince Che, and eventually succeeded by means of solid arguments. In June 1966, in an unpublished letter, he wrote to Che:

> Dear Ramón:
>
> Events have overtaken my plans for a letter. I read in full the draft of the book on your experiences in the C. [Congo], and I also reread the manual on guerrilla warfare in order to make the best possible analysis of these questions, especially considering the practical importance with regard to plans in the land of Carlitos [Carlos Gardel, ie Argentina]. Although there is no point right now in discussing this with you, I will just say that I found the work on the C. extremely interesting and I think it was really worth the effort you made to leave a written record of everything. […]
>
> *About your situation:*
>
> I have just read your letter to Bracero [Osmany Cienfuegos] and have spoken extensively with the Doctor [Aleida March, Che’s wife].
>
> In the days when an act of aggression seemed imminent here, I suggested to several compañeros the idea of asking you to return, an idea that turned out to be on everyone’s mind. El Gallego [Manuel Piñeiro[2]] was given the job of sounding you out. From the letter to Bracero I see that you were thinking exactly the same thing. But right now we can no longer make plans based on that supposition

because, as I explained, our impression now is that for the time being nothing is going to happen.

It seems to me, however, that given the delicate and worrying situation in which you find yourself there, that you should consider the usefulness of jumping back here.

I am well aware that you are especially reluctant to consider any option that involves a return to Cuba for the moment, unless it is in the quite exceptional circumstances mentioned above. But analyzed in a sober and objective way, this actually hinders your objectives; worse, it puts them at risk. I find it very hard to accept the idea that this is right, or even that it can be justified from a revolutionary point of view. Your time at the so-called halfway point increases the risks; it makes extraordinarily more difficult the practical tasks that need to be carried out; and far from accelerating the plans, it delays their fulfillment; moreover, it subjects you to a period of unnecessarily anxious, uncertain and impatient waiting.

What is the reason for all this? There can be no question of principle, honor or revolutionary morality involved here that would prevent you from making effective and thorough use of facilities that you can certainly depend on to achieve your goal. No fraud, no deception, no tricking of the people of Cuba or the world is involved in making use of the objective advantages of being able to enter and leave here, to plan and coordinate, to select and train cadres, and to do everything from here that you can achieve only with great difficulty from where you are or somewhere similar. Neither today nor tomorrow, nor at any time in the future, could anyone consider it wrong—nor should you in all conscience. What would really be a grave, unforgivable error is to do things badly when they could be done well; to have a failure when all the possibilities are there for success.

I am not insinuating, not in the least, that you abandon or postpone your plans, nor I am letting myself be carried away by pessimistic considerations due to the difficulties that have arisen. On the contrary, the difficulties can be overcome, and more than ever we can count on having the experience, the conviction and the means to carry out those plans successfully. That is why I think we

should make the best and most rational use of the knowledge, the resources and the facilities that we have at our disposal. Since first hatching your now old idea of further action in another setting, have you ever really had enough time to devote yourself entirely to this matter, to conceiving, organizing and executing your plans to the greatest possible extent? […]

It is a huge advantage for you to be able to use what we have here, to have access to houses, isolated farms, mountains, cays and everything essential to organize and personally lead the project, devoting 100 percent of your time to this and drawing on the help of as many others as necessary, with only a very small number of people knowing your whereabouts. You know perfectly well that you can count on these facilities, that there is not the slightest possibility that you will encounter problems or interference for reasons of state or politics. The most difficult thing of all—the official disassociation—has already been done, not without paying a price in the form of slander, intrigues, etc. Is it right that we should not extract the maximum benefit from it? Has any revolutionary ever had such ideal conditions to fulfill their mission, and at a time when that mission acquires great importance for humanity, when the most crucial and decisive struggle for the victory of the peoples is breaking out? […]

Why not do things well if we have every chance to do so? Why don’t we take the minimum time necessary, even while working at the greatest speed? Didn’t Marx, Engels, Lenin, Bolívar and Martí have to wait, sometimes for decades?

Moreover in those times, there were no airplanes or radios or other things that today shrink distances and increase the yield of each hour of a human being’s life. We ourselves had to invest 18 months in Mexico before returning here to Cuba. I am not proposing that you wait decades or even years but only a few months, because I believe that in a matter of months, by working in the way I suggest, you can get underway in conditions incomparably more favorable than those we are trying to achieve at present.

I know you will be 38 on the 14th [of June 1966]. Or maybe you think that a man starts to age from that point.

> I hope that these lines will not annoy or upset you. I know that if you analyze what I say seriously, your characteristic honesty will lead you to accept that I am right. But even if you come to a completely different decision, I won't feel disappointed. I write to you with deep affection and the greatest and most sincere admiration for your brilliant and noble intelligence, your irreproachable conduct and your unyielding character of a whole-hearted revolutionary. And the fact that you might see things differently won't change these feelings one iota nor affect our collaboration in any way.

That same year Che returned to Cuba.[3]

On the first anniversary of the victory of the Congolese revolution, I took part in the celebrations and had a chance to talk to some of the compañeros who had fought alongside Che. I also took the opportunity to discuss with them the publication of this book as I was concerned about what they might think of it. Che's diary is highly critical and quite blunt in the hope that an analysis of the errors made in the Congo would ensure that they were not made again. He makes specific mention of several leaders, including Laurent Kabila, who later became a key leader of that country.[4]

I was told that Che Guevara is remembered with respect and affection. Most of the Congolese leaders were young at the time but they recalled Che's simplicity, his modesty and the respect he showed them by placing himself under their command. For this reason, they are aware that his advice has always been useful in the great task of unifying their country and ensuring that for the first time in many years the Congolese people benefit from their country's wealth.

So in conclusion, we can say that human beings don't die when their life and example serve as a guide to many others, and those others succeed in continuing that work.

Aleida Guevara March

1. Aleida Guevara March is one of Che Guevara's daughters. She is a pediatrician and has participated in various Cuban internationalist missions in Africa and Central America.

2. Manuel Piñeiro Losada (Barbarroja or "Red Beard") after the victory of the revolution held various posts in the Ministry of the Interior, from head of the National Intelligence Directorate to first vice-minister. He was also head of the Americas Department of the Central Committee from 1975 to 1992.

3. Che returned to Cuba in 1966 and immediately began preparations for the guerrilla mission to Bolivia. He left Cuba for Bolivia in November of that year.

4. Laurent Kabila was president of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (1997-2001) after overthrowing the dictatorship of Mobuto Sese Seko. He was succeeded by his son Joseph when he was assassinated in 2001.

CONGO DIARY

Episodes of the Revolutionary War in the Congo

For Bahasa and his fallen compañeros, in search of the meaning of their sacrifice.

PREFACE: AN INITIAL WARNING

This is the story of a failure. It descends into anecdotal detail, as one would expect in an account of episodes of a war, but this is modified by observations and a critical spirit as I believe that, were this account to have some merit, it would be to allow certain experiences to be drawn out that might be useful to other revolutionary movements. Victory is a great source of positive experiences, but so is defeat, especially in light of the extraordinary circumstances that surrounded these events: the protagonists and source of information were foreigners who went to risk their lives in an unknown land, where people spoke a different language, and where they were bound only by ties of proletarian internationalism, thereby initiating a new feature in modern wars of liberation.

At the end of the narrative there is an epilogue that poses some questions about the struggle in Africa and, more generally, the national liberation struggle against the neocolonial type of imperialism, the most terrible form in which imperialism presents itself, given the disguises and subtleties that accompany it, and the long experience that the powers that practice it have had in that form of exploitation.

These notes will be published long after they were dictated, and it may be that the author will no longer be able to take responsibility for what is said here. Time will have smoothed many rough edges and, should the publication of these notes be considered to have some importance, the editors may make any corrections they deem necessary (with appropriate footnotes) to clarify events or opinions in light of the time that will have passed.

More accurately, this is the story of a decomposition. When we arrived on Congolese soil, the revolution had stalled; later, events took place that would mean its definitive retrogression, at least at that time and in that immense field of struggle that is the Congo. The aspect that interests us

here is not the story of the decomposition of the Congolese revolution. Its causes and key features were too deep for me to have been able to capture them all from my particular vantage point; rather, it is the process of the collapse of our own fighting morale. The experience we initiated should not be ignored and the inauguration of the International Proletarian Army must not be allowed to die at the first failure. It is essential to analyze in depth the problems that arise and find a solution. A good instructor on the battlefield does more for the revolution than the teacher of considerable numbers of raw recruits in peacetime, but the characteristics of this instructor, the catalyst in the training of future revolutionary technical cadres, should be studied carefully.

The idea that guided us was to ensure that men experienced in Cuba's liberation struggle and the subsequent battles against reaction fought alongside men without experience. We aimed to bring about what we called the "Cubanization" of the Congolese. We will see, however, that the effect was the exact opposite, in that eventually there was a "Congolization" of the Cubans. "Congolization" refers to habits and attitudes toward the revolution that were typical of the Congolese soldiers at that time. This does not reflect a derogatory opinion of the Congolese people, but it does reflect such a view of the soldiers of those days. We will try to explain why those combatants displayed such negative traits in the course of this narrative.

As a general norm, one that I have always followed, nothing but the truth will be told in these pages, or at least in my interpretation of the events, although it may be challenged by other subjective evaluations or corrections, should any errors have crept into my account.

At some points, where it would be indiscreet or inadvisable to tell the truth, some specific references been omitted because there are certain things the enemy should not know. Moreover, what we consider here are issues that may assist friends in the reorganization of the struggle in the Congo (or in the launching of the struggle elsewhere in Africa or other continents that face similar challenges). Among the matters that have been omitted are the ways and means by which we reached Tanzania, our springboard into the setting of this story.[1]

The names of the Congolese mentioned here are their real ones, but nearly all combatants of the Cuban contingent are referred to by the Swahili

names we gave them on their arrival in the Congo. The real names of the compañeros who participated will be included in an appendix, should the editors decide that this would be useful.

Lastly, it is necessary to emphasize that we have highlighted various cases of weakness on the part of individuals or groups, as well as the general demoralization that eventually overcame us, in strict adherence to the truth, recognizing the importance these incidents may have for future liberation movements. But this in no way detracts from the heroic character of the effort. The heroic character of this participation flows from the general position of our government and the Cuban people. Our country, the sole socialist bastion on the doorstep of Yankee imperialism, sends its soldiers to fight and die in a foreign land, on a distant continent, and publicly assumes full responsibility for its actions. In this challenge, in this clear position on the great modern-day issue of waging a relentless struggle against Yankee imperialism, lies the heroic significance of our participation in the struggle of the Congo.

It is there we see the readiness of a people and its leadership not only to defend themselves but to attack, because when it comes to Yankee imperialism, it is not enough to be resolute in defense. It has to be attacked in its bases of support in the colonies and neocolonies that are the foundation of its system of world domination.[2]

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1. Che left Cuba for the Congo on April 1, 1965, after a process of disguising himself in order to assume the identity of Ramón Benítez. He was accompanied by José María Martínez Tamayo and Víctor Dreke. The night before they left, Fidel visited them to say good-bye. They traveled from Cuba to Prague and Cairo and arrived in Tanzania April 5-6. Other members of the column left Cuba in the following weeks, in groups of three or six, and took various different routes, arriving in Tanzania after Che, Martínez Tamayo and Dreke.

2. It is from this perspective that Che analyzes imperialist domination as a world system—how it functions to protect its interests, guarantee exploitation and challenge any attempt at resistance or liberation as well as its various forms of colonialism and neocolonialism. Che’s actions were completely consistent with his ideas. He practiced internationalism in an attempt to coordinate and unify the anti-imperialist struggle.

FIRST ACT

In this kind of story, it is difficult to establish the first act. For the sake of narrative, I will begin with a trip I made to Africa that gave me the chance to rub shoulders with many leaders of the various liberation movements.[1] Particularly instructive was my visit to Dar es-Salaam, where a considerable number of *Freedom Fighters*[2] had taken up residence. Most of them lived comfortably in hotels and had made a career out of their situation, sometimes lucrative and almost always congenial. This was the setting for a series of interviews in which they generally asked for military training in Cuba and financial assistance. It was the leitmotif of nearly all of them.

I also met the Congolese combatants. From our first meeting with them, we could clearly see the extraordinary number of diverse tendencies and opinions that gave a distinct character to this group of revolutionary leaders. I made contact with Kabila and his General Staff, and he made an excellent impression on me. He said he had come from the interior of the country, but apparently he had only come from Kigoma, a small Tanzanian town on Lake Tanganyika and one of the main settings of this story. It was the point of departure for the Congo and a comfortable place for revolutionaries to take refuge when they had their fill of the hazardous life in the mountains across the water.

Kabila's presentation was clear, detailed and resolute; he allowed his opposition to Gbenyé and Kanza to show, as well as how much he disagreed with Soumialot. He argued there could be no talk of a Congolese government because Mulele, the initiator of the struggle, had not been consulted, and so the president could only claim the title of head of the government of northeastern Congo. This also meant that Kabila's own zone in the southeast, which he led as vice-chairman of the party,[3] lay outside Gbenyé's sphere of influence.

Kabila realized perfectly well that the main enemy was US imperialism, and he declared his readiness to carry the fight against it through to the end. As I said, his statements and his confidence made a very good impression on me.

On another day, we spoke with Soumialot. He is a different kind of man, much less politically mature and much older. He lacked the basic instinct to keep quiet or to speak very little, using vague phrases, so that he seemed to express great subtlety of thought but, however much he tried, he was unable to give the impression of a real popular leader. He explained what he has since made public: his involvement as defense minister in the Gbenyé government, how Gbenyé's action took them by surprise, etc. He also clearly stated his opposition to Gbenyé and, above all, Kanza. I did not personally meet these last two, except for a quick handshake with Kanza when we happened to meet at an airport.

We talked at length with Kabila about what our government considered a strategic mistake on the part of some African friends: namely, that in the face of open aggression by the imperialist powers, they promoted the slogan: "The Congo problem is an African problem," and acted accordingly. Our view was that the Congo problem was a worldwide problem, and Kabila agreed.[4] On behalf of our government, I offered him some 30 instructors and whatever weapons we might have, and he was happy to accept these. He recommended that both should be delivered urgently, as did Soumialot in another conversation—the latter saying it would be a good idea if the instructors were black [ie, Afro-Cuban].

I decided to hear what the other *Freedom Fighters* had to say by having a friendly chat with them in separate meetings. But due to a mistake by embassy staff, there was a "tumultuous" meeting attended by 50 or more people, representing movements from 10 or more countries, each divided into two or more tendencies. I gave them a rousing speech and considered the requests nearly all of them made for financial assistance and training of personnel. I explained the cost of training someone in Cuba, the investment of money and time required, and the uncertainty that it would produce combatants who would be useful for the movement.

I described our experience in the Sierra Maestra, where we obtained roughly one soldier for every five recruits we trained, and only one good

one for every five soldiers. I argued as forcefully as I could to the exasperated *Freedom Fighters* that most of the money invested in training would not be well spent and that a soldier, especially a revolutionary soldier, cannot be trained in an academy.[5] Only in war does he become a soldier. He might receive a diploma from some college or other, but his real graduation—as is the case with any professional—takes place in the practice of his profession, in the way he reacts under enemy fire, to suffering, to defeat, to relentless pursuit, to adversity. You can never predict from what someone says, or from their previous history, how an individual will react when faced with the experience in fighting in a people's war. I therefore suggested that training should take place not in our far-off Cuba but in the nearby Congo, where the struggle was not against some puppet like Tshombe but against US imperialism, which, in its neocolonial form, was threatening the newly acquired independence of almost every African people and helping to keep the colonies in subjection. I spoke to them of the fundamental importance which the struggle for the liberation of the Congo had in our eyes. A victory would be continental in its impact and consequences—and so would a defeat.

The reaction was worse than cool. Although most refrained from any kind of comment, some asked to speak and violently rebuked me for what I had said. They argued that their respective peoples, who had been abused and degraded by imperialism, would protest if any casualties were suffered not as a result of oppression in their own land, but from a war to liberate another country. I tried to show them that we were not talking about a struggle within fixed borders, but of a war against the common oppressor, present as much in Mozambique as in Malawi, Rhodesia[6] or South Africa, the Congo or Angola. No one saw it this way.

The farewells were cool and polite, and we were left with the clear sense that Africa had a long way to go before it achieved real revolutionary maturity. But we had also had the pleasure of meeting people prepared to carry the struggle through to the end. From that moment, we set ourselves the task of selecting a group of black [Afro-] Cubans, volunteers of course, and sending them to reinforce the struggle in the Congo.

1. Che carried out a tour of Africa that lasted three months after participating in the XIX General Assembly of the United Nations. On December 17, 1964, he set out on a trip that took him to eight African countries: Algeria, Mali, Congo (Brazzaville), Guinea, Ghana, Dahomey (today Benin), Tanzania and Egypt, in addition to a very brief visit to China. During his travels throughout the continent, Che met with the principal leaders of those countries, as well as with leaders of liberation movements in the region, to establish closer links with the Cuban revolution and offer them aid in their struggles. He met with Ahmed Ben Bella, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and Sékou Touré, the presidents of Algeria, the United Arab Republic (Egypt) and Guinea, respectively; he also met the Angolans Agostinho Neto and Lucio Lara of the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), Samora Michel and Marcelino Dos Santos from Mozambique and the Congolese leader Laurent Désiré Kabila, among others.

His participation in the Second Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity held in Algiers was of great importance. Cuba had been invited as an observer and sole representative from Latin America. In his speech Che analyzed that necessarily international dimension of the anti-imperialist struggle, concluding that proletarian internationalism "is not only a duty for the peoples struggling for a better future, it is also an inescapable necessity." (See *Che Guevara Reader,* Ocean Press) In this confrontation with imperialism, Che argues it is necessary to forge an alliance between the two principal actors, the underdeveloped countries and the socialist countries, even when he admits that "these alliances cannot be made spontaneously, without discussions, without birth pangs, which sometimes can be painful."

On this road to international unity and solidarity, Che criticizes the socialist countries, saying that, as the vanguard, they had a moral duty to commit to genuine solidarity with the peoples initiating their liberation struggles, instead of establishing economic, commercial and political relations with them that were, in some ways, tacitly complicit in imperialist exploitation. For Che, the nature of the new relationship between the socialist countries and the Third World would be the result of the necessary change in consciousness that should reflect the new socialist society, leading to "a new fraternal attitude toward humanity, both at an individual level, within the societies where socialism is being built or has been built, and on a world scale, with regard to all peoples suffering from imperialist oppression." Che returned to Cuba on March 14, 1965.

2. Che uses this term in English.

3. A reference to the Supreme Council of the Congolese Revolution.

4. In Che's analysis and denunciations of imperialist aggression against any attempt to achieve liberation by any people, anywhere in the world, he repeatedly referred to the Congo and its assassinated revolutionary leader, Patrice Lumumba, whom Che called a martyr of the world revolution. In Che's eyes, the tragic events in the Congo were an example of the most brutal and extreme form of the penetration and development of neocolonialism, as well as telling proof of the barbarism and bestiality that imperialism is capable of in pursuing hegemonic control over peoples and their natural resources. In his speech to the XIX UN General Assembly, he denounced the role played by that international organization as an instrument used by imperialism to pursue its interests on the pretext of carrying out "humanitarian" missions.

"How can we forget," Che asked, "the machinations and maneuvers that followed the occupation of [the Congo] by UN troops, under whose auspices the assassins of this great African patriot acted with impunity?" He also pointed out the convergence between reactionary Congolese sectors and

countries such as the United States, Great Britain and Belgium, concluding, “All free people of the world must be prepared to avenge the crime of the Congo.”

5. Che’s concept of a revolutionary combatant is not limited to the military dimension, but rather views the combatant as a representative of the vanguard of a people on their way to liberation. In his book *Guerrilla Warfare* (Ocean Press) Che defines the revolutionary combatant, the guerrilla, as a “social reformer” who “launches himself against the conditions of the reigning institutions at a particular moment and dedicates himself with all the vigor that circumstances permit to breaking the mold of these institutions.” Che emphasizes the importance of ideological motivation and further argues the guerrilla movement can only survive with the support of the local population and, for that reason, the behavior of individual guerrillas must be strictly ethical at all times. In analyzing the Cuban experience in his essay “Socialism and Man in Cuba,” Che stressed the importance of example, noting, “in the attitude of our [Rebel Army] combatants could be glimpsed the man and woman of the future.”

For further reading on Che Guevara’s views on revolutionary combatants, see: “What is a Guerrilla Fighter?” in the newspaper *Revolución*, February 19, 1959; “Morale and Discipline of Revolutionary Combatants,” *Verde Olivo* magazine, March 17, 1960; and “Guerrilla Warfare: A Method” in *Che Guevara Reader* (Ocean Press) as well as his book, *Guerrilla Warfare* (Ocean Press).

6. Here “Rhodesia” is used in a geographic not political sense to refer to the area occupied by Zambia and Zimbabwe. In 1910, Northern Rhodesia (today Zambia) separated from Southern Rhodesia, which was called Rhodesia after 1964. In 1980, it became known as Zimbabwe, after independence following the Lancaster House (London) agreements of September and December of 1979.

SECOND ACT

The second act opens in the Congo and includes some incidents whose meaning, for the time being, still cannot be explained, such as my appointment at the head of the Cuban forces, even though I am white; the selection of the future combatants; the organization of my secret departure, the limited possibility for leave-taking, the explanatory letters, the whole series of secret maneuvers that it would be dangerous even today to put on paper, and which can anyway be clarified at a later date.[1]

After the hectic round of bittersweet farewells, which in the best scenario was expected to be for a number of years, the last step was the clandestine journey itself, the details of which also cannot be revealed.

I was leaving behind nearly 11 years of work alongside Fidel for the Cuban revolution, and a happy home, if that is the right word for the abode of a revolutionary dedicated to his task and a bunch of kids who scarcely knew how much I loved them. The cycle was beginning again.

One fine day I turned up in Dar es-Salaam. No one recognized me, not even the ambassador—an old compañero [Pablo Rivalta] who had been with us in the invasion [of central Cuba during the revolutionary war in 1958] and was a captain in the Rebel Army—or was able to identify me.

We installed ourselves on a small farm, rented as temporary accommodation as we waited for the group of 30 men who were to join us. At that point there were three of us: Commander Moja, an Afro-Cuban, who was the official head of our force; Mbili, a white compañero with great experience in these matters; and Tatu—myself, presented as a doctor—whose color was explained by the fact that I spoke French and had guerrilla experience. Our names meant: one, two, three, in that order. To save ourselves headaches, we decided to number ourselves by order of arrival, and to use the corresponding Swahili word as our name.

I had not told any Congolese of my decision to fight in their country, and opted not to inform them of my presence for the time being. I didn't mention it in my first conversation with Kabila because nothing had been decided; and once the plan was approved, it would have been dangerous for the plan to be known before I reached my destination as I had to travel through a lot of hostile countries. I therefore decided to present my arrival as a *fait accompli* and to proceed from there, according to how they reacted. I was not unaware that a negative response would put me in a difficult situation as I could no longer return [to Cuba], but I also calculated that it would be difficult for them to refuse me. I was blackmailing them with my physical presence.

But an unexpected problem arose. Kabila was in Cairo with all the members of the revolutionary government, discussing aspects of combat unity and the new constitution of the revolutionary organization. His deputies, Massengo and Mitoudidi, were there with him. The only person left with authority was Tchamlesso, later to acquire the Cuban nickname "Tremendo Punto." Tchamlesso accepted on his own responsibility the 30 instructors that we offered initially, but when we told him that we had some 130 men, all black [Afro-] Cubans, ready to begin the struggle, he took responsibility for accepting this also. This slightly changed the first part of our strategy because we had assumed we would be operating on the basis of 30 Cubans accepted as instructors.

A delegate headed off for Cairo to tell Kabila and his compañeros that the Cubans had arrived (but not that I was there), while we waited for the arrival of the initial contingent.

Our most urgent task was to find a fast boat with a good motor, so that we would be able to cross in relative safety the 70 kilometers that was the width of Lake Tanganyika at the crossing point. One of our good experts had arrived in advance to take charge of both buying the launches and exploring the way across the lake.

After waiting several days in Dar es-Salaam—a wait which, though short, made me anxious because I wanted to get to the Congo as soon as possible—the first group of Cubans arrived on the night of April 20. Fourteen of us then set off, leaving behind four new arrivals for whom equipment had not yet been purchased. We were accompanied by two

drivers, the Congolese representative (Tchamlesso), and a Tanzanian policeman to clear up any problems en route.

Right from the start, we confronted a reality that would vex us throughout the struggle: the lack of organization. This greatly concerned me because our passage must have been detected by imperialism, which has power over all the airline companies and airports in the region, apart from the fact that the purchase of unusual quantities of backpacks, nylon sheeting, knives, blankets, etc. must have attracted attention in Dar es-Salaam.

Not only was the Congolese organization bad; ours was too. We had not thoroughly prepared for the task of equipping a company, and had obtained only rifles and ammunition for the soldiers, all armed with Belgian FALs.

Kabila had not arrived and announced he expected to remain in Cairo two more weeks, so that, as I had been unable to discuss my own involvement with him, I had to carry on incognito, not even announcing myself to the Tanzanian government in order to ask for its acquiescence. To be honest, these problems did not bother me particularly because I was eager to play a role in the Congo struggle and I feared that my offer might arouse an extremely sharp reaction and that the Congolese—or the friendly government itself—might ask me not to become involved in the conflict.

On the evening of April 22 we reached Kigoma after an exhausting journey, only to find the launches were not ready and we had to wait another day to make the crossing. The regional commissioner, who received us and organized accommodation, wasted no time in telling me of the Congolese complaints. Unfortunately, all indications were that many of his judgments were correct: the commanders in the area, who had received our first exploratory delegation, were now in Kigoma; and we verified that they were granting passes for men to go there from the front. That little town was a sanctuary where the fortunate ones could go and live away from the hazards of the struggle. The nefarious influence of Kigoma—its brothels, alcohol and especially its secure refuge—would never be sufficiently understood by the revolutionary command.

Finally, at dawn on April 24, we landed on Congolese soil and met a surprised group of well-armed infantry, who solemnly formed up into a little guard of honor. We were shown into a hut that had been specially vacated for us.

Our original information, obtained (I have no idea how) by our inspection agents, had been that on the Congolese side there was a 10-mile-wide plain stretching inland to the mountains. In reality, however, the lake is a type of ravine and the mountains, both at Kigoma and on the other side, begin right at the water's edge.[2] At a place known as Kibamba, where the General Staff was located, a difficult climb began 10 paces or so from our point of disembarkation, all the more difficult for us given our lack of previous training.

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1. The process of selecting and training the Cuban combatants to participate in the guerrilla struggle in the Congo began toward the end of January of 1965, after Che passed on to the Cuban government the requests he had received from African liberation movements. Men were selected from units of Cuba's Revolutionary Armed Forces (FAR). The volunteers selected for this internationalist mission had to be Afro-Cuban in order to facilitate their integration into the African liberation movements. Training took place in the months of February and March in various camps located in the mountains of Pinar del Río province and involved about 500 members of the Cuban military with various military ranks and levels of combat experience from which 113 were selected. Commander Victor Dreke was initially appointed to head the column, but toward the end of March he was informed of the decision to name Che Guevara as head of the mission.

2. This refers to the Mitumba Mountains on the western (Congolese) shore of Lake Tanganyika.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

On arrival, after a brief rest on the floor of the hut among backpacks and assorted junk, we began to become acquainted with Congolese reality. We immediately noticed a clear distinction: besides people with very little education (generally peasants), there were others better educated, a distinct style of dress and a better knowledge of French. The distance between the two groups could hardly have been greater.

The first people I got to know were Emmanuel Kasabuvabu and Kiwe, who introduced themselves as officers on the General Staff, the former in charge of supplies and munitions, the latter, information. Both were loquacious and expressive young men and what they said, and what they held back, soon revealed the divisions inside the Congo. Later, “Tremendo Punto” invited me to a small meeting, which was not attended by those compañeros but by another group comprising the commander of the base and several brigade leaders. This included the head of the First Brigade, Colonel Bidalila,[1] who commanded the Uvira front; the Second Brigade, under the command of Major-General Moulana, was represented by Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert; and Ngoja Andre, who was fighting in the Kabambare area, representing what seemed likely (from various remarks made) to become a future brigade. Agitated, “Tremendo Punto” proposed that Moja, the official head of our forces, should participate in all meetings and decisions of the General Staff, along with another Cuban chosen by Moja. I observed the others’ faces and noticed no approval of the suggestion; “Tremendo Punto” did not appear to be particularly popular among the leaders.

The reason for the hostility among the groups was that, one way or another, some men did spend a certain amount of time at the front, whereas others merely traveled back and forth between the Congo base and Kigoma, always to go get something that was not to hand. The case of “Tremendo

Punto” was more serious in the combatants’ eyes because, being the representative in Dar es-Salaam, he only occasionally came to the Congo.

We chatted on in a friendly manner without mentioning the proposal, and I discovered a number of things that I had not known before. Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert explained with a friendly, cheerful spirit that airplanes had no importance for them because they had *dawa,* a medicine that makes a person invulnerable to bullets.[2]

“I’ve been hit a number of times, but the bullets simply fell to the ground.”

He said this with a smile on his face, and I felt obliged to respond to the joke, which I saw as a sign of how little importance they attached to the enemy’s weapons. But I soon realized it was meant seriously, that the magical protection of *dawa* was one of the great weapons of triumph of the Congolese army.

This *dawa* did a lot of damage to military preparedness. It operates according to the following principle: A liquid in which herbal substances and other magical ingredients have been dissolved is thrown over the combatant, and certain occult markers—nearly always including a coal mark on the forehead—are administered to him. This protects him against all kinds of weapons (although the enemy too relies upon magic), but he must not touch anything not belonging to him, touch a woman or feel fear, or the protection will be ineffective. The reason for any failure was very simple: a dead man is one who became fearful, stole or slept with a woman; and anyone wounded is someone who succumbed to fear. As fear accompanies war, wounds were quite naturally attributed to fear—that is, to a lack of faith. And as the dead cannot speak, all three transgressions can be readily ascribed to them.

This belief is so strong that no one goes into battle without having the *dawa* performed on them. I was constantly afraid that this superstition would rebound against us, and that we would be blamed for any military disaster involving a lot of casualties. I tried several times to discuss the *dawa* with those in leadership positions in an effort to win people away from it—but this was impossible. The *dawa* is treated as an article of faith. Even the most politically developed argued that it is a natural, material

force and that they, as dialectical materialists, recognized the power of the *dawa*, whose secrets lie with jungle medicine men.

After the talk with the brigade leaders, I met with “Tremendo Punto” alone and explained who I was. He was devastated. He kept talking of an “international scandal” and insisting that “no one must find out, please, no one must find out.” It had come as a bolt from the blue and I was fearful of the consequences, but my identity could no longer be a secret if we wanted to use the influence I could exert.

That night, “Tremendo Punto” left to inform Kabila of my presence in the Congo; the Cuban officials who had been with us on the crossing and the naval technician departed with him. The technician had the task of sending two mechanics—by return mail, so to speak—since one of the weaknesses we had noted was the complete lack of maintenance of the boats used for crossing the lake and their engines.

The next day, I asked that we be sent to the permanent camp, a base five kilometers from the General Staff headquarters, at the top of the mountains that rose (as mentioned previously) from the lake’s shore. The delays began immediately. The commander had gone to Kigoma to sort out some matters, and we had to wait for him to return. Meanwhile, a rather arbitrary training program was discussed, and I made a counterproposal: namely, to divide 100 men into groups no larger than 20, and to give them all an overview of infantry activity, with some specialization in weapons, engineering (especially trench-digging), communications and reconnaissance, in keeping with our capabilities and the means at our disposal. The program would last four to five weeks, and the group would be sent to carry out operations under Mbili’s command. Then it would return to base, where a selection would be made of those who had proved themselves. In the meantime, the second company would be trained, so that it in turn could go to the front when the first one returned. I thought this would allow the necessary selection to be made while the men were being trained. I explained again that, due to the nature of recruitment, only 20 would remain as potential soldiers out of the original 100, and only two or three of them as future leading cadre, in the sense of being capable of leading an armed unit in combat.

The response was evasive as usual and they asked me to put my proposal in writing. I did this but I never learned what became of that

document. We kept insisting that we should go up and start work at the Upper Base. We had counted on losing a week there to get things ready in order to be able to work at a certain pace, and now we were waiting for just the simple problem of the move to be resolved. We couldn't go up to the base because the commander had not arrived; or we had to wait because they were "in meetings." Days passed like this. When the matter was raised again, as I did with truly irritating tenacity, a new excuse was always offered. Even today, I don't know how to explain this. Maybe it was true that they did not want to start preparatory work so as not to ignore the relevant authority, in this case the commander of the base.

One day I ordered Moja to go to the Upper Base with some men, on the pretext of training them for a march. He did this and the group returned at night, weary, soaked and chilled to the bone. It was a very cold and wet place, with constant mist and persistent rain; the people there said they were making a hut for us, which would take another few days. With patience on both sides, I outlined various arguments why we should go up to the base: we could help build the shelter in a spirit of sacrifice, so that we would not be a burden, etc., etc. and they would then search for new pretexts for delay.

This enforced holiday saw the beginning of enjoyable talks with Compañero Kiwe, the head of information. He is a tireless conversationalist, who speaks French at an almost supersonic speed. Day after day in our conversations he would offer me an analysis of the most important figures in the Congolese revolution. One of the first to receive a lashing from his tongue was Olenga, a general in the Stanleyville area and in Sudan. According to Kiwe, Olenga was little more than an ordinary soldier, maybe a lieutenant in Bidalila's forces, who had been charged by Bidalila to make some incursions toward Stanleyville and then return. But instead of doing this, Olenga initiated his own operations during those easy moments of revolutionary flux, and raised himself by one rank each time he captured a village. By the time he reached Stanleyville he was a general. The conquests of the Liberation Army ended there—which solved the problem because, if they had continued, there were no further military grades with which to reward Compañero Olenga.

For Kiwe, the real military leader was Colonel Pascasa, who later died in a fight among the Congolese in Cairo; he was the man with genuine military knowledge and a revolutionary attitude, and he represented Mulele.

On another day, Kiwe very subtly raised criticisms of Gbenyé, commenting casually that his attitude had been unclear at the beginning and now, although he was the president and a revolutionary, there were more revolutionary leaders, etc. As the days passed and we became better acquainted, Kiwe portrayed Gbenyé as a man more suited to lead a gang of thieves than a revolutionary movement. I cannot vouch for Kiwe's claims, but some are quite famous: for example, the story of Gbenyé's role in Gizenga's imprisonment, when he was minister of the interior in the Adoula government. Others are less well known, but if they are true, they cast a sinister light on Gbenyé, such as plots to assassinate Mitoudidi and connections with the Yankee embassy in Kenya.

On another occasion, the target of Kiwe's tongue was Gizenga, whom he described as a revolutionary, but a left-wing opportunist, who wanted to do everything by the political road, who thought a revolution could be made with the army, and even that he had been given money to organize the revolutionary forces in Leopoldville,[3] but he had used it instead to form a political party.

These chats with Kiwe gave me some idea of what certain figures were like, but above all they very clearly highlighted the lack of cohesion in this group of revolutionaries (or malcontents), who constituted the General Staff of the Congolese revolution.

So the days passed. Messengers crossed the lake with an amazing capacity to distort any news, and others went off to Kigoma on some leave or other.

In my capacity as a doctor (an epidemiologist—which, if this illustrious branch of the Aesculapian fauna forgives me for saying so, entitled me to know nothing about medicine), I worked for a few days with Kumi at the clinic and noticed several alarming facts: the first being the high number of cases of venereal disease, often due to infection picked up in Kigoma. What concerned me at the time was not the state of health of the general population and the prostitutes of Kigoma, in particular, but the fact that the frequent trips across the lake meant many of our combatants could become infected. Other questions also arose. Who paid those women? Where did the money come from? How were the revolution's funds being spent?

From the first few days of our stay, we also had the opportunity to see some cases of alcohol poisoning caused by the famous *pombe*. This is a spirit distilled from fermented corn and cassava flour, which is not so high in alcohol content but the distilled liquor has terrible effects. Presumably these arise not so much from the concentration of the alcohol itself as from the amount of impurities contained in the liquor due to the rudimentary method of its production. There were days when the camp was awash with *pombe*, leaving behind a trail of brawling, drunkenness, indiscipline, etc.

Peasants from the surrounding area began to visit the clinic after hearing on “Radio Bemba” [word of mouth] that there were doctors in the area. Our supply of medicines was poor, but a Soviet medical consignment came to our aid. It had not been selected with a civilian population in mind, but naturally to meet the needs of an army in the field—and even then, it did not contain an adequate range of medicines. Such imbalances were to be a constant feature of our time in the Congo. The shipments of very valuable weapons and equipment were sent in such a way that they always turned out to be incomplete. Shipments inevitably featured cannon and machine guns without ammunition or essential components; rifles arrived with the wrong ammunition, mines without detonators—this was the inevitable character of supplies arriving from Kigoma.

In my opinion, although I have not been able to confirm this in detail, all these failures were due to the disorganized state of the Congolese Liberation Army, and to the shortage of cadres with a minimal capacity to check equipment as it arrived. The same occurred with medical supplies, with the additional factor that they were stored in one gigantic mess in La Playa, where the reserves of food and weapons were piled in total chaos. I tried several times to obtain permission for us to organize the warehouse, and I suggested that some types of ammunition—such as bazooka or mortar shells—should be moved out of there. But nothing happened until much later.

Contradictory news arrived from Kigoma every day. Occasionally an item was repeated so often that at some point it became true, for example, that a group of Cubans was waiting for a boat, an engine or something to get through; or that Mitoudidi would cross the lake tomorrow or the day after, and then—when the day after tomorrow arrived—that he would be crossing the following day, etc.

Around this time, we heard news of the conference in Cairo[4] from Emmanuel on one of his frequent trips to Kigoma and back. The result had been a complete triumph for the revolutionary line. Kabila would stay for a while to make sure that the agreement was implemented, then he would go somewhere to have an operation on a cyst—not very serious but bothersome—and this would delay him a little longer.

We had to find something to do to avoid total idleness, so we organized lessons in French and Swahili, as well as general education classes, which were desperately needed by our troop. Given the nature of the classes and the teachers, this could not contribute much to the compañeros' education, but it did have the important function of passing the time. Our morale remained high although complaints were starting to be heard among the compañeros as they watched the days pass unproductively. Also hovering over us was the specter of malaria and the other tropical fevers that struck nearly everyone in one form or another; these often responded to malaria drugs, but left behind troublesome aftereffects, such as general debility or lack of appetite, which added to the incipient pessimism creeping into the troop's morale.

As the days went by, the picture of organizational chaos became more evident. I myself took part in the distribution of Soviet medical supplies and this resembled a gypsy marketplace; each representative of the armed groups produced figures, and cited facts and reasons why he should have access to a greater amount of medicine. There were several conflicts as I tried to stop some medicine or special equipment being unnecessarily carried off to the front lines, but everyone wanted everything. They started to claim incredible numbers of combatants in their group: one declared 4,000, another 2,000, etc. These were inventions, which had no objective basis except in the number of peasants living near the army and potentially becoming a source of future combatants. But, in reality, the real number of soldiers or armed men in the base camps was significantly less.

During these days, the various fronts were almost completely passive and if people had gunshot wounds to be attended, these were the result of accidents. Since hardly anyone had the faintest idea about firearms, they tended to go off when they were played with or treated carelessly.

On May 8, 18 Cubans led by Aly finally arrived along with Mitoudidi, the head of the General Staff, but he had to return immediately to Kigoma to search for guns and ammunition. We had an amicable conversation, and he left me with an agreeable impression of reliability, seriousness and organization. Kabila sent word that I should be very reserved about my identity and so I remained incognito as I acted in my apparent role as doctor and translator.

We agreed with Mitoudidi that the move to Upper Base would take place the next day. This happened, but we left behind Moja, Nane and Tano, who had come down with fever, and the doctor Kumi to take care of the hospital. I was sent to the base as doctor and translator. There were scarcely 20 Congolese there, looking bored, lonely and uncomfortable. The struggle began to break this inertia; we started with classes in Swahili, given by the political commissar at the base, and in French, assigned to another compañero. We also started building shelters as protection against the freezing temperatures. We were at 1,700 meters above sea level and 1,000 meters above the level of the lake, in an area where trade winds from the Indian Ocean condense causing continuous rainfall. We immediately commenced the task of building shelters, and we soon had blazing fires to ward off the nocturnal cold.

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1. **Che's note:** According to the latest reports, he has been promoted to general.

2. In an autobiographical short story *Doubt,* Che offers an extraordinary analysis of this question of *dawa,* interspersed with philosophical reflection from a human and cultural perspective on this mystical-religious belief among the Congolese combatants. See: *Self-Portrait: A Photographic and Literary Memoir,* by Ernesto Che Guevara (Ocean Press).

3. Today Kinshasa.

4. The conference of the National Liberation Council (CNL) was held between late May and early April 1965 where the Supreme Council of the Congolese Revolution was constituted.

THE FIRST MONTH

Near the Upper Base, some four hours on foot (the only possible means of locomotion), a group of hamlets, each numbering no more than 10 huts, lies scattered over a huge area of natural grazing land. The cluster of settlements, known by the generic name of Nganja, is populated by a tribe that originally came from Rwanda, and which, despite living in the Congo for several generations, retains the ineradicable spirit of its homeland. Their life is pastoral, though not nomadic. Cattle are at the center of their economy, providing them with both food and money. We heard frequently of the troubles of a Rwandan soldier, who lacked the number of cows required by the father of the woman of his dreams. Moreover, women too are bought, and to have several is a sign of economic power—quite apart from the fact that it is they who do all the work in agriculture and in the home.

During the course of the war, this proximity enabled us from time to time to enjoy the precious beef that is a cure even for homesickness—almost.

The Rwandans and the different Congolese tribes regard each other as enemies, and the borders between ethnic groups are clearly defined. This makes it very difficult to carry out political work that aims toward regional union—a phenomenon common throughout the length and breadth of the Congo.

In my first few days at the Upper Base, I paid tribute to the climate of the Congo by coming down with a very high, though short-lived, fever. Our doctor, Kumi, came up from the Lake [Base] to visit me, but I sent him back as he was needed in the clinic and I was already feeling better. On the third or fourth day they brought in a man wounded in some skirmish at Front de Force; he had not received medical attention for six days, so his arm that had been fractured by a bullet was now suppurating profusely. I

had to get up to attend to him in a cold drizzle, and this may have caused my relapse with a very high fever and delirium, bringing Kumi up to the base for a second time. It was like climbing Mount Everest for him, and according to eyewitnesses—because I was in no state to appreciate the fact—his condition after the long, steep ascent appeared worse than that of the patient he had come to attend.

The relapse didn't last long either—about five days in all—but the effect left was an extraordinary weakness that overcame me and even took away my appetite. During the first month, no less than a dozen compañeros paid for their novitiate in this hostile land with raging fevers whose aftereffects were equally troublesome.

The first formal order that we received was issued by Mitoudidi, who had returned from Kigoma, was to prepare for an attack on Albertville to be carried out by two columns. It was assumed we would play the main role in the fighting. The order was absurd; there had been no preparation, we were only 30 in number, and 10 of these were sick or convalescing. But I explained the instructions to the men and told them they should be prepared to go into battle, although I would try to change or at least postpone the plans.

On May 22 we heard one of the many crazy reports that worried us greatly: "A Cuban minister is crossing the hills and many more Cubans have arrived." This was so irrational that no one believed it, but I went a way down the mountain to get some exercise and, to my great surprise, encountered Osmany Cienfuegos.[1] Embraces were followed by explanations: He had come to hold talks with the Tanzanian government and, in passing, had asked for permission to visit the compañeros in the Congo. He had been refused as a matter of principle, on the grounds that other Cuban ministers would then want to visit the operations center; but in the end they relented and here he was. I also discovered that the Tanzanian government was not yet aware of my presence.

Along with Osmany came 17 of the 34 men who had arrived in Kigoma. In general, he brought good news, but for me personally it included the saddest news of the whole war. Telephone calls from Buenos Aires reported that my mother was very ill, leading me to expect the worst. Osmany had not been able to get any further information and I had a month of

uncertainty, waiting to hear something that I already suspected, but hoping that there had been a mistake, until finally my mother's death was confirmed.[2] She had wanted to see me shortly before my departure, probably because she was already feeling unwell, but the advanced state of the preparations for my trip had made this impossible. Moreover, she never received the farewell letter addressed to her and my father that I had left in Havana; it would only be delivered in October, when my departure was made public.

Mitoudidi came to the Upper Base, and we discussed various aspects of the military situation. He insisted on drawing up a grand strategic plan for the capture of Albertville, but I managed to convince him that at this stage this was too ambitious, and hence too risky, to deal with Albertville, and that it was more important to acquire real knowledge of the whole zone of operations and of the resources at our disposal as the General Staff had no clear picture of what was happening at each of the isolated fronts. Everything depended on reports from the field commanders, but in order to get what they wanted, they inflated their figures and, in order to escape blame, attributed disasters to a lack of weapons or ammunition. We agreed to send delegations to the various fronts, in order to clarify the respective situations of our men and the enemy, as well as the relationship of forces.

Four groups were organized to conduct the appropriate investigations: Aly, with three other compañeros, was to go to the Kabimba area; Nne, with two others, to Front de Force; Moja and Paulu, to the area of Baraka, Fizi and Lulimba; Mitoudidi and I would go to Uvira. The last of these trips did not happen in the end. First, there were the usual delays: a lack of boats, shortage of gasoline and unforeseen circumstances; then Kabila announced his imminent arrival, and we had to wait for him day after day—in vain.

The first reports of the inspections in Kabimba and Front de Force showed that there were real armed forces there, apparently with a will to fight, although in the case of Kabimba with no training or discipline, and only a certain amount in the case of Front de Force, but all with the same degree of disorganization in keeping track of weapons, observation of the enemy, political work, etc.

In summarizing the situation at the end of May, roughly a month after the first group arrived on April 24, I noted the following in my field diary:

> Until Mitoudidi arrived, it was time lost; since then, we have been able to do reconnaissance and have found good receptivity to our suggestions. Perhaps tomorrow, serious training will begin with a group of men that has been promised. It is almost certain that, in the month of June, we will be able to show something by engaging in combat for the first time.
>
> The main defect of the Congolese is that they don't know how to shoot, so ammunition is wasted; so it's necessary to begin there. The discipline here is very bad, but one has the impression that things change at the front, where the guys are subject to an accepted discipline although there is always a notable lack of organization.
>
> The most important tasks are: teaching them how to shoot, to fight by laying ambushes (real guerrilla warfare), and establishing certain military norms of organization that will allow us to concentrate our full strength at the point being attacked.

Today we can recognize that the apparently greater discipline at the front was false, and that our three priorities—shooting, ambush technique and the concentration of units for major attacks—were never achieved in the Congo.

The groupings had a tribal character and adopted a positional warfare approach; that is, the combatants occupied what they called barriers. They were generally located in well-chosen places from a tactical point of view, in very high hills to which access was difficult. But camp life for the men meant carrying out no military operations or even undergoing training, confident in the enemy army's inactivity and relying on the peasants for supplies. The peasants had to bring them food and were frequently humiliated and mistreated. The fundamental character of the People's Liberation Army was that it was a parasitic army that did not work, did not train, did not fight, and demanded provisions and labor from the local population, sometimes with extreme brutality. The peasants were at the mercy of groups who came on leave from the camps to demand extra food, and who repeatedly consumed their poultry and little luxury food items they kept in reserve.

The revolutionary soldier's staple food was *bukali*, which is prepared in the following way: cassava root is peeled and left to dry in the sun for a few days; then it is ground in a mortar exactly like those used for grinding coffee in our mountainous regions; the resulting flour is sifted, boiled in water until it forms a paste, and then eaten. With a good effort, *bukali* provides the necessary carbohydrates, but what was eaten there was semi-raw, unsalted cassava; this was sometimes complemented with *zombe*, cassava leaves pounded and boiled, and seasoned with a little palm oil and the meat of some hunted animal. There was plenty of game in that region, but meat was eaten only occasionally. It cannot be said that the combatants were well fed; very little was caught in the lake. But one of their bad habits was their incapacity to march to the base to look for food. On their shoulders they only carried a rifle, a cartridge-belt and their personal effects, which generally was no more than a blanket.

After a while, when we had begun communal living with this unique army, we heard some statements typical of their view of the world. If someone was given something to carry, he would say: *"Mimi hapana motocari!"* ("I'm not a truck!"). In some cases, when he was with Cubans, this would become: *"Mimi hapana Cuban!"*("I'm not a Cuban!"). The food, as well as the weapons and ammunition for the front, therefore, had to be transported by the peasants. It's clear this type of army can only be justified if, like its enemy counterpart, it actually fights now and again. But as will be seen, this requirement was not met either. And if this state of affairs did not change, the Congolese revolution was inevitably doomed to failure as a result of its own internal weaknesses.

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1. Osmany Cienfuegos was the brother of Commander Camilo Cienfuegos. He was minister of public works of the Cuban revolutionary government and president of the foreign relations commission of the first Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, whose members were Foreign Minister Raúl Roa and Commander Manuel Piñeiro Losada. Osmany Cienfuegos was also general secretary of the Organization for the Solidarity of the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL), and, until 2009, vice-president of the Council of Ministers.

2. This painful moment for Che is reflected in the autobiographical short story, *The Stone*, which shows his great sensibility and literary talent. See: *Self-Portrait: A Photographic and Literary Memoir* by Ernesto Che Guevara (Ocean Press).

A HOPE DIES

The days that followed were much like the preceding ones. It was a distressing time because we started to hate the angle formed by the two hills that led down to the lake, affording a glimpse only of the stretch of water that they defined as the horizon.

In spite of his goodwill, Mitoudidi did not find the formula that would have allowed us to get down to work. He was most likely restrained by a concrete order from Kabila, whose arrival he anxiously awaited. We all waited, while days passed, one after another, with no change for our expeditionary force.

Moja returned from his tour of inspection to Baraka, Fizi and Lulimba. The impression he brought back was really disastrous. Although he had been received with enthusiasm by the local population, and quite correctly by the leading compañeros, a number of dangerous symptoms were obvious. The first was the open hostility with which people spoke of Kabila and Massengo, as well as Compañero Mitoudidi. All of them were accused, more or less, of not only being outsiders in the region but also of being mere transients who were never where their people needed them.[1] There were plenty of armed men in the zone, but they were held back by appalling disorganization, the effects of which, it can be said, were not just similar but even worse than in other cases we had encountered. The big shots spent the day drinking until they got into the most incredible state, without worrying how it might appear to the local people because they considered it the natural behavior of “men.” Considering the facilities at that time for the transport of essential materials across the lake, they had access to enough gasoline to keep traveling back and forth from one end of their extensive sector to the other, although no one could believe these trips served any purpose.

The barrier near Lulimba was seven kilometers from the town, in the highest part of the mountains. It had been a long time since the revolutionary forces had come down to launch an attack, or even to carry out any reconnaissance in the zone; their only activity was to fire off a recoilless 75 mm. cannon. Without knowing the rules of indirect fire (that gun can be used to score a direct hit on a target only up to a distance of 1.5 kilometers), and without knowing the enemy's exact position, they entertained themselves with massive rocket displays with 75 mm. shells.

I drew all this to Mitoudidi's attention, and he affirmed the envoys' impressions, that Moulana, a self-styled major-general in charge of the area, was an anarchist devoid of all revolutionary consciousness who had to be replaced. Mitoudidi had called him in for discussions, but he had refused to come, suspecting that he would be arrested.

As nothing else could be done, we kept insisting on reconnaissance missions and again sent Nane and Nne leading small groups to continue the inspections of the Front de Force and Katenga zones that seemed to offer some possibilities. Aly also set out on a mission to reconnoiter the area around the town of Kabimba and the road from Kabimba to Albertville, and to find some practical route between Front de Force and Kabimba. But he found himself impotent in face of the obstacles put in his way by the head of that sector.

Each morning we heard the same old tune: Kabila has not arrived today, but tomorrow for sure, or the day after tomorrow…

Boats continued to arrive with plenty of high-quality weapons; it was a great pity to see how they squandered the resources of friendly countries (mainly China and the Soviet Union), the efforts of Tanzania, and the lives of some combatants and civilians with so little results.

Mitoudidi, now committed to organizing the [Upper] Base, took on the no small task of cracking down on the drinkers and thereby confronted 90 or 95 percent of the men. He also put a freeze on the delivery of arms and ammunition and, among other things, demanded that those who were using heavy weapons should show proof of their ability before they were given anything else, which at least ensured that nothing more would be distributed. But the challenges were too great and he was only one man; his assistants gave him very little help in this task.

We became quite good friends. I explained that my greatest handicap was my lack of direct contact with the combatants who didn't speak French, so he sent one of his aides to teach me Swahili, so that I could communicate directly with the Congolese in that language. Ernest Ilunga, charged with initiating me into the mysteries of the language, was an intelligent young man. We began our classes with great enthusiasm, dedicating three hours a day, but the truth is that I was the first to reduce this to one hour, not for lack of time—I had too much of that, unfortunately—but because my character is completely incompatible with learning other languages. Another difficulty I was unable to overcome during my time in the Congo was the fact that Swahili is a language with quite a rich and advanced grammar, but in this country it is used as what they call their national language, alongside the mother tongue or dialect of their own tribe, so that Swahili has to some extent become the language of conquerors and a symbol of superior power. It is the second language of nearly all the peasants, but the backwardness of the region means that what they actually speak is a highly simplified "basic Swahili." Moreover, they adapted very easily to our halfway language, because they found it easier to communicate in this way. Bound up as I was in these contradictions, I could not speak either grammatical Swahili or the peculiar regional version in that part of the Congo in my entire time there.

During these days I also got to know Mundandi, the Rwandan commander at Front de Force. He had studied in China and made quite a good impression of being firm and serious; but in our first conversation he revealed he had caused 35 enemy casualties in one battle. I asked him how many weapons he had captured as a result of the 35 casualties. He answered "none," explaining that they had attacked with bazookas and that the enemy weapons had been blown into tiny fragments. My diplomatic qualities have never been very refined, and I told him quite bluntly that he must be lying. He then exonerated himself, on the grounds that he had not been present at the actual fighting but had been informed by his subordinates, etc. The matter was left to rest there—but since exaggeration is the norm in that region, to call a lie a lie is not the best way to establish fraternal relations with anyone.

On June 7, I set out for the Upper Base, after having consulted with Mitoudidi about the veracity of the promises that Kabila would be coming

in the morning. He tacitly led me to believe that he was not expecting Kabila to return in the near future, especially as Chou En-lai[2] was visiting Dar es-Salaam at the time and it made sense for Kabila to go there to try to put various requests with the Chinese leader.

As I was making the difficult climb back to the Upper Base, a messenger caught up with us to say that Mitoudidi had just drowned. His body remained in the water for three days, before being discovered on the 10th, when his body rose to the surface of the lake. Due to the fact that two Cubans had been in the boat at the time of the accident, I was able to reach the following conclusion from a series of personal conversations and inquiries.

Mitoudidi had been on his way to Rwandasi, the place where he was thinking of transferring the General Staff. It was hardly three kilometers from the Kibamba [Lake] Base,[3] but he went by water because of the poor state of the road. There was a strong wind and big waves on the lake. It would appear that he accidentally fell into the lake. From then on a series of strange events occurred that could be attributed to outright stupidity, extraordinary superstition (the lake supposedly being inhabited by all manner of spirits), or to something more serious. The fact is that Mitoudidi, who could swim a little, managed to remove his boots and—according to various witnesses—called out for help for some 10 to 15 minutes. People threw themselves into the water to save him, and one of these, his orderly, also drowned; Commander François, who was accompanying him on the journey, also disappeared (I never found out whether he fell in at the same time or jumped in to save Mitoudidi). When the accident happened, they stopped the outboard motor, which made it impossible to maneuver the boat in any way. Then they started it up again, but it seems that some magical force prevented them from approaching the spot where Mitoudidi was floundering. In the end, while he continued to call for help, the boat headed for shore and the compañeros saw him go under shortly afterwards.

The nature of human relations among the Congolese leaders is so complex that it’s hard to know what to make of this. What is certain is that the man in charge of the boat at the time, who was also an army commander, was later sent to a different front—the explanation given to me

being that the compañero had been involved in a number of incidents at the base.

Thus, a stupid accident took the life of the man who had begun to implant some organization in the terrible chaos of the [Kibamba] base. Mitoudidi had been young (no more than 30 years old), and had served as a functionary with [Patrice] Lumumba and a combatant with Mulele. Mitoudidi had said that Mulele had sent him to this area at a time when no revolutionary organization was functioning there. In our frequent conversations, he said Mulele had diametrically opposed methods, and described the completely different character of the struggle in that other part of the Congo, although he never gave any hint of criticism of Kabila or Massengo and he attributed all the disorganization to the peculiarities of the region.

I don't know the reason—perhaps it had something to do with race or former reputation—but when Kabila arrived in the region, he was the chief and Mitoudidi became the head of his General Staff. The truth was that the only person with authority had now disappeared in the lake. The next day, the news was already known in the surrounding area, and Kabila gave signs of life by sending me the following brief note:

> I have just heard about the fate of brother Mitu, and of the other brothers. As you can see, I am deeply hurt by it.
>
> I am worried about your safety; I want to come right away. For us, this sad story is our destiny. All the comrades with whom you arrived should remain where they are until my return, unless they want to go to Kabimba or to see Mundandi in Bendera.
>
> I trust in your steadfastness. We will put everything into motion so that we can transfer the base on a date certain.
>
> During my absence, I have sorted out some matters with Compañero Muteba, and with Bulengai and Kasabi.
>
> In friendship,
>
> *Kabila*

Compañero Muteba, who was deeply affected by Mitoudidi's death, came to see me to ascertain exactly our views about what had happened. It was probably due to superstition that they were contemplating the move to a different base; but I didn't want to raise any objections because it seemed a very delicate issue and I thought it wiser to avoid giving a clear answer. We discussed the most important problems that had brought us to the Congo; we had been there nearly two months and still had achieved absolutely nothing. I mentioned the reports I had written for Compañero Mitoudidi that had disappeared with him, and then he asked me to do a general report for him about the situation to forward to Kabila. I took on this task and wrote the following. (I should explain that this text is slightly different from the original, as in several places, my deficient French forced me to look for the word I knew, rather than the one I really intended. The letter is addressed to Compañero Muteba and was confidential.)

> *General considerations:* Given that my experience of the Congo is limited to a month and a half, I cannot venture many opinions. I believe that we face one main danger: US imperialism.
>
> It is not necessary to analyze why the North Americans are a specific danger. The Congolese revolution is in a stage of regrouping its forces, after the most recent defeats it has suffered. If the Yankees have learned lessons from other revolutions, now is the moment they would choose to strike hard and, first of all, take measures such as a neutralization of the lake; that is, to do everything necessary to close our main supply route. On the other hand, world events such as the struggle in Vietnam and the recent intervention at Santo Domingo are tying their hands somewhat. Time is therefore an essential factor for the consolidation and development of the revolution, which can be achieved only through heavy blows against the enemy. Passivity is the beginning of defeat.
>
> But our own lack of organization hinders us from mobilizing all our forces and attacking those of the enemy. This can be seen in a number of interconnected aspects.
>
> 1. There is shortage of cadres with no unified central command with real power over all the fronts, which would confer what is known in

military terms as a unity of doctrine (I refer specifically to this area, not to the Congo in general).

2. The general shortage of cadres with sufficient level of education and absolute loyalty to the revolutionary cause results in a proliferation of local chiefs, each with his own authority and both tactical and strategic freedom of action.

3. The dispersal of our heavy weapons through an egalitarian distribution that leaves the command without reserves—quite apart from the poor way these weapons are used.

4. There is a lack of discipline in the military units, which have been infected by the prevailing localism and have had no prior training.

5. The commanders are incapable of coordinating the movements of units beyond a certain size.

6. There is a general lack of the minimum training necessary to handle firearms, a lack all the more serious in the case of weapons requiring special combat preparation.

All this produces an inability to carry out substantial tactical operations, and therefore strategic paralysis. These are problems that every revolution has to face, and there is no cause for alarm; it is only necessary to take systematic measures to rectify them.

Cuban involvement: Our black population suffered the worst exploitation and discrimination in Cuba. Their involvement in the struggle was very important, especially the peasants in Oriente [province], most of whom were illiterate.

As a result, there were very few blacks among our main military figures or properly trained middle cadres. When we were asked to send black [Afro-] Cubans by preference, we looked to the best elements in the army who had some combat experience. As we see it, our contingent has a very good fighting spirit and precise knowledge of tactics on the ground, but has little academic preparation.

The foregoing is by way of an introduction to our proposals for action. Given the characteristics of the soldiers, our involvement should mainly be in combat and tasks related to the direct struggle.

We could do this in two ways:

1. We could split our contingent among the various units at the front as instructors in the handling of weapons and as combatants with Congolese forces.

2. Create mixed combat units, initially under Cuban command, that would carry out clearly defined tactical missions and expand their radius of operations through the development and training of Congolese command cadres. (Given the small size of our force, there should be no more than two of these units.) A central training base would be maintained, with Cuban instructors insofar as they were needed.

We favor the second proposal, for both military and political reasons: military, because it would guarantee leadership in accordance with our concept of guerrilla struggle (which we think is correct); political, because our successes would dispel the atmosphere that surrounds foreign troops who have different religious, cultural and other ideas, and would enable us to control our own forces better. A greater degree of dispersal could lead to conflicts due to the lack of understanding of Congolese reality that our command believes is being acquired.

We could perform (necessary) complementary work, such as plans for training units, help in the training of a General Staff (and understanding of the services and, above all, of the weapons are weak areas), the organization of public health or military sanitation, or any other task we might be assigned.

Our assessment of the military situation: There is persistent talk of the capture of Albertville. But we think that, at the present moment, there is a higher task facing our forces for the following reasons:

1. We have not been able to dislodge the enemy from enclaves within our natural defense system (these mountains).

2. We don’t have sufficient experience for such a large-scale initiative that would require the mobilization of units of at least battalion strength and their synchronization through an operational high command.

3. We don’t have enough military equipment for an action of this scale.

Albertville should fall as the result of gradual, tenacious action on our part—perhaps it would be more appropriate to speak of its being abandoned by the enemy. First, we must completely deflate the enemy’s fighting morale (which is relatively high at present), by means of systematic attacks on their lines of supply and reinforcements; then annihilate, or force the withdrawal, of the enemy forces from Kabimba, Front de Force, Lulimba, etc., combining the above tactics with frontal assaults where the relationship of forces is more favorable, clandestine action on all the roads leading to Albertville, frequent sabotage operations and ambushes and paralysis of the economy; then, finally the seizure of Albertville.

For reasons that I will develop in another report, the results of our reconnaissance lead me to think that Katenga would be the best place to start operations.

The reasons I can give today are the following.

1. Its garrison is relatively small.

2. We think we can ambush reinforcements as their supply line runs parallel to the mountains.

3. If Katenga were to fall and remain in our hands, this would isolate Lulimba, as the gateway to Kasongo.

Following this letter, I sent the reconnaissance report on Katenga, the analysis of the situation and a recommendation to attack. At that time it was

relatively easy to attack Katenga because the total inactivity of our forces meant that the enemy's vigilance in the area was practically nonexistent.

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1. For Che, a characteristic of the guerrilla nucleus is that it must guarantee that revolutionary political power remains intact, being "relatively safe but not outside the war, not giving directions from some other country or from distant places. It should be within its own country, fighting." Che stressed this in his 1961 article, "Cuba: Historical exception or vanguard in the anticolonial struggle?" in *Che Guevara Reader* (Ocean Press). This became one of his major criticisms of the Congolese leadership.

2. Prime Minister of the People's Republic of China from its establishment in 1949 until his death in 1976. He was also minister of foreign relations (1949-58) and led the Chinese delegation to the Bandung Conference in 1955.

3. In Che's original manuscript he wrote "Kabimba" in error. This is another place on Lake Tanganyika located further south, where Che never went.

A DEFEAT

Mitoudidi's replacements embarked for Kigoma, and some, like Compañero Muteba, the bearer of my letter to Kabila, we never saw again for the duration of the war.

The base was again overcome by chaos with an almost conscious frenzy, as if to make up for time lost during Mitoudidi's intervention. Orders and requests succeeded one another without the slightest trace of rationality. We Cubans were asked to staff machine guns spread along the lakeside, thereby condemning a number of compañeros to inactivity. Given the prevailing lack of discipline, it would have been impossible to use Congolese machine-gunners to defend the base from air attack as they didn't know how to use those weapons and didn't want to learn; with a few honorable exceptions, they never operated machine guns during our entire time in the Congo. They ran away from aircraft, instead of methodically doing something about them, even though machine guns played a role in driving away enemy aircraft. The crews were mainly mercenaries, and after one or two skirmishes, they lost interest in fighting against ground-based weapons and turned to the strafing and bombing of areas where there was no antiaircraft defense. Nevertheless, I think the fact that the men at the Lake [Base] were inactive was a pointless waste of our combat strength as the enemy was unable to mount an effective attack; four T-28s and two B-26s were the only force the enemy had.

We continued to face the same difficulties at the Upper Base, only with many compañeros suffering from Congo fever and with no trainees as those promised by Mitoudidi never arrived. We saw representatives of distant guerrilla units show up to take away arms and ammunition, which they would squander, waste or break for no purpose. Compañero Mundandi arrived around the middle of June, bringing some letters from Kabila. One, dated June 16, stated the following:

Comrade,

I have read and reread the report you sent with Brother Muteba for my attention. As I said before, comrade, I want to begin some ambushes; Comrade Mundandi will talk to you about this. Please allow a good 50 Cubans with the rank of combatant to take part in the attack of June 25 under the leadership of Mundandi.

You are a revolutionary and I ask you to put up with all the difficulties you find there as I will arrive very soon. You can also send a good dozen men to Kabimba.

Intimate greetings,

Kabila

P.S. I appreciated your plan concerning Bendera that Nando showed me. It is almost identical to what we had been thinking. Courage and patience. I know that you are suffering because of the poor organization, but we are doing everything to improve it. It's the fault of our lack of leaders.

Hasta la vista,

Kabila

As Kabila said he agreed with the plan I had sent, we began discussing an attack with Mundandi, not on Bendera, but on Katenga a few kilometers away. Mundandi proved hard to pin down; he had no definite plan himself, just an order to attack on June 25. I asked him why on that date and again he had no answer. We discussed our plan for attacking, not Bendera directly, but the village of Katenga, in order to draw reinforcements that we could destroy on the road, but he would not respond yes or no. He seemed to be a simple soul, entrusted with a task beyond his capabilities; but there was also a large dose of dissembling.

Evidently, Mundandi and Kabila had decided between themselves to attack Front de Force, perhaps trusting that a surprise attack might lead to a large-scale victory over the enemy army. I feared for the safety of the Cubans and Rwandan compañeros, who were supposed to take part in the

action, if they staged a direct attack on unknown positions in which there were trenches, natural defenses and heavy weapons. My first reaction was to participate personally in the operation. Kabila had specified that the men should put themselves under Mundandi's orders, thus subtly rejecting my proposal that Cubans should lead the tactical actions involving mixed troops. I decided that this was not the most important aspect, thinking that with my authority I would be able to push through correct solutions in the course of discussions. Mundandi knew who I was and seemed to respect me. I therefore wrote Kabila a short note as follows:

> Dear comrade,
>
> Thank you for your letter. You can rest assured that my impatience is that of a man of action; it implies no criticism. I am able to understand things because I myself have lived through similar conditions.
>
> I also eagerly await your arrival because I consider you an old friend and I owe you an explanation. At the same time, it is my duty to place myself unconditionally under your orders.
>
> As you instructed, the Cubans will leave tomorrow for Front de Force. Unfortunately, many are sick and the total number will be a little lower (40). There are four comrades in Kabimba. We will send the others as they arrive.
>
> I would ask you one favor: Give me permission to go to Front de Force, with no other title than that of my compañeros' "political commissar," fully under the orders of Comrade Mundandi. I have just talked to him and he is in agreement. I think this might prove useful. I would report back within three or four days of receiving your call.
>
> Greetings,
>
> *Tatu*

I had actually discussed with Mundandi the possibility of my going along, and—on the face of it, at least—he had been in agreement. But he stressed

that he would have to send the men without waiting for Kabila's reply, and this made me suspect that it would be negative.

The reply arrived a few days later and was not negative but evasive as usual. Still I had time to write a second letter, urging him to give me a frank "yes" or "no." This allowed for no beating around the bush, and he simply did not answer it. So I didn't go to Front de Force.

The men left on the appointed day, numbering 36 rather than the 40 I had mentioned. But shortly afterwards we sent another seven, making a total of 43. We received reports that all were well, but that the attack had been delayed. Mundandi had not yet showed up. The men sent a request to have a doctor on hand, and we were able to grant this because just then a group of 39 more compañeros had arrived, including three doctors (a surgeon, an orthopedist and a general practitioner).

The first battle report stated:

> Tatu or Kumi, the attack began at 5:00 a.m. today, June 29, 1965. We are doing well. Apparently Katenga is under attack. Five of our compañeros, Nane as group leader and two Rwandan compañeros are there.
>
> *Patria o Muerte!* [Homeland or death!]
>
> *Moja*

And later:

> It's 7:30 [a.m.]. Things are going well. The men are very content and conducting themselves well. Everything started at the appointed time. We opened fire with a cannon shell and a mortar round. I'll send more information later.

At the same time as this note, however, there was alarming news of scores of dead, Cubans killed, men wounded, which made me think that all was not well. Shortly before they set out, I had received a note:

> On the 29th we will do it at Front de Force. It was not possible to convince the man. We'll report after the event.

Compañeros Mbili and Moja had long discussions trying to persuade Commander Mundandi not to attack in the way he had planned, but he did not shift his position, claiming to have orders from Kabila. Later, Kabila would say he had given no such orders.

At Front de Force or Front Bendera, there is a hydroelectric power station on the banks of the Kimbi River; its water source is almost in the mountains controlled by the Rwandans, while the electricity lines pass across level ground (as the mountains fall sharply down to the high plain of the Congo Basin). The village is divided in two: an old part, before one reaches the power station, and a newer part close to the turbines, where there is a military quarter with more than 80 houses. The Kimbi River, one of its natural defenses, was suitably reinforced with trenches that had been very superficially reconnoitered before the attack. There was also a landing field for light aircraft. It was thought that an enemy battalion of 500 to 700 men might be there, plus a concentration of special troops four kilometers away, at the junction with the Albertville road where there was said to be a cadet school or a military training college.

All we were able to achieve with Mundandi was that Cubans were put as commanders in charge of the main combat zones. The attached diagram[1] gives a rough idea of the disposition of forces only on the northern side, with ambushes on both sides of the Lulimba to Albertville road. The plan was as follows:

A small group led by Ishirini would attack the so-called *chariot*, the source supplying water to the hydro-electric turbine; below, across the Kimbi River, a group of men under Lieutenant Azi would attack the fortified positions closest to the mountain; and in the center, Lieutenant Azima and a group of Rwandans would capture the airfield and advance to link up with Azi; meanwhile Lieutenant Maffu would have another group preventing movement from Lulimba and Lieutenant Nne, who was in the strongest position with a 75 mm. cannon and other heavy weapons, would lay ambushes on the road from Albertville. The command post, where Moja and Mundandi would remain, would be on the other side of the Kimbi River

at the base of the mountain foothills. Mundandi originally proposed having two command posts, but he was persuaded that it would be best for them to be united.

This plan had some serious drawbacks. Nne had to march to an unfamiliar area that had not been reconnoitered. Maffu knew something about the area, as did Azi, and Azima had made a superficial examination with binoculars from the mountains. But as we were expecting reinforcements to be sent from Albertville, we should have had a very well-laid ambush; instead we were setting one up blindly. There was a lot of discussion with Mundandi for the main effort to be directed at Katenga, and in the end he agreed to send an order to Captain Salumu to attack there. But, as became clear later, the order was given for the 30th, whereas Mundandi went ahead on the 29th.

At Front de Force, things did not go remotely as well as the first indications had led us to expect.

Ishirini, along with two other Cubans and seven Rwandans armed with rocket launchers and rifles, had the task of attacking the *chariot* to silence a machine-gun nest and to cause some damage to the plant; but all that happened was that the lights went out for a few minutes. The Rwandan combatants remained a couple of kilometers away from the scene of the action, which was carried out by the Cubans alone. To give some idea of the confusion, I will transcribe in full the report by Lieutenant Azi, whose mission was to attack across the Kimbi River:

> When I set off on the mission, I positioned the mortar, the cannon, the antiaircraft and terrestrial machine guns so they had a direct line of fire at the enemy from a distance of 300 meters, except for the mortar that was at 500 meters, and followed up with 49 Rwandans and five Cubans. We crossed the river that was 150 to 200 meters from the enemy mortars. Then, at 100 meters from the enemy position, one of the Rwandans accidentally fired a shot; the troop became disorganized and we lost five, leaving 44. I organized the men into three groups, with two Cubans in mine and one in each of the others. By 3:00 a.m. on the 29th we had occupied the positions, some at 25 meters from the enemy, others further away. We could

hear several bursts of enemy machine-gun fire. At 5:00 a.m. as planned, the cannon, the mortars, the antiaircraft and other machine guns opened fire and we continued shooting at the infantry. All the weapons hit the mark; firing went on uninterrupted until 6:00, by which time I had three wounded men on my front. At 7:00, I couldn't hear firing to my left from our troops. I moved around a little and saw that many Rwandans were missing. Then I armed three Cubans with machine guns instead of FALs: these were Achali, Angalia and myself, plus a Rwandan captain. At 8:45 two Rwandans were killed; I went off to the left to look for Tano to send a message to Moja; the men in the center and the group on the left, including the Rwandan officers, had withdrawn on their own initiative. I was left with 14 Rwandans, and I had one Cuban missing (Tano, in the center group). I sent Angalia with the first message to Moja. By 10:00 I had four Rwandans left, including one officer. I held out until 12:00 and then withdrew 25 meters with two dead and three wounded. I sent another message to Moja, held on there until 12:30, and then withdrew to the mortar and cannon position, passing the river. Before withdrawing, I looked for the position where Tano and Sita were, but I could see neither. Sita turned up later. At the mortar position, I received orders from Moja to withdraw the mortar, the machine guns and the cannon and to leave an ambush in case the enemy guardsmen crossed the river. I maintained this position until 6:00 a.m. on June 30, when I received an order to withdraw from that place completely. Only Cubans were left at the ambush: Anzali, Achali, Ahiri, Abdallah, Almari and Azi; there was not one Rwandan. The Rwandans were ordered by the command post to occupy the positions, and they went over the mountain to the camp. The Rwandans abandoned their weapons and ammunition, and did not collect their dead. Compañero Azima was under my orders, carrying out the mission of occupying the other side (right bank of the river, some 500 meters from our positions) along with Alakre, Arobo and 40 Rwandans. On the night when they moved to occupy the positions, the Rwandans heard a noise and said it was a *tembo* (elephant), and then left the two Cubans alone on the

> mountain; thus the Cubans had to return to the command post at 7:00 on the 29th.

This was more or less the theme of the whole operation. It began with a lot of bravado—even though men were missing at many of the positions even before the fighting started—and then turned into a complete rout.

Compañero Tano appeared seven days later. He had been wounded and abandoned by his compañeros. He then dragged himself toward the mountain, where he was found by Rwandan soldiers on patrol. His wound healed and he was able to rejoin the struggle.

To complete the picture, here is another report [from Moja] from the same day:

> We can report that the Rwandan compañeros retreated in disorder from the front, leaving behind weapons, ammunition, dead and wounded. These were collected by our compañeros, as the compañero Commander Mundandi witnessed.
>
> Compañero Nne's mission, which was the principal one, was to occupy the Albertville to [Front de] Force road to prevent the passage of enemy reinforcements, but according to the information we have at present, he didn't reach the agreed place because the guide said he was lost. Compañero Nne then made a wrong decision to attack the military academy, where, according to the reports from our Rwandan compañeros who took part in the action, the only men still there when it began were our own compañeros and some Rwandan compañeros who died or, in two cases, were wounded. Right at the start of the action, Compañero Nne asked them to deploy the cannon, but the Rwandan compañeros who had been carrying it took off in the direction of the camp and left the shells and other pieces which were collected by some of our own compañeros.
>
> When we learned of Compañero Nne's death, we sent Compañero Mbili with 20 reinforcements to see how things really stood there, and they discovered that Compañero Maffu's ambush included Compañeros Kasambala, Sultán, Ajili and others belonging

to Nne's group. When Compañero Mbili saw the situation, he informed me of it and asked for some more men so that, if I thought it appropriate, he could head off with them to the road. By this time it was 18:00 on the 29th.

When I discussed the problem with Commander Mundandi, he told me that the Rwandan compañeros were refusing to fight. We therefore had no more men to send for the ambush because the surviving Rwandan compañeros from Nne's group had set out for the base, while the 20 Rwandans with Compañero Mbili also refused to fight, and the men under Maffu's command were in the same situation. We therefore thought of sending word to Mbili that he should leave four or five of our compañeros to look for dead bodies, while the others should return on the night of 6/30/65. But at 04:00 on the 30th, only he and the other Cuban compañeros were left at Compañero Azi's position, and their situation was raised with the compañero Commander Mundandi. The decision was then taken that they should withdraw to a nearby hill.

The other problems that Compañero Mbili encountered during this operation he will explain to you in detail.

The command post, where Commander Mundandi was also located, was some 800 meters from the front (beside the river). We had there: Moja, Mbili, Paulu, Saba and Anga.

We did not leave more at the command post as we thought that the ambushes should be strengthened because of the distances involved.

Bahasa and Ananane were too ill for combat and remained at the base camp.

Moja

Everything was against Compañero Nne. He had discussed his plan beforehand with Maffu, thinking that he would carry out the ambush and then turn to attack the enemy's position; he had proposed this idea to the command but did not get approval; nevertheless, he went ahead with the idea. Once the battle was underway elsewhere, there was little possibility of

reaching the designated place because the guide was so terrified that he would not take another step, and no one else knew the way. Nne decided to attack the position he had in front of him at the start of the fighting—that is, the military academy—but he was met with intense, well-coordinated fire from heavy weapons. According to eyewitnesses, Nne himself was soon wounded and handed over his machine gun position to Kawawa, but then Kawawa was killed by a mortar, and another two compañeros were slightly wounded and withdrew. A scout sent out shortly afterwards found Thelathini's body; Ansurune was missing and presumed dead. They had started the engagement at a point within the enemy's sights, at a distance of some 200 meters. In addition to the four Cuban compañeros, at least 14 Rwandans were killed—including the brother of Commander Mundandi. The exact number cannot be established as the Rwandan accounting was very poor.

In this ill-fated action, I assign much of the blame to the Cuban command. Compañero Nne, underestimating the enemy, launched an undeniably daring operation to carry out what he considered his moral duty, although not his specific task; he launched a frontal attack and perished along with other compañeros, leaving open the way from Albertville along which enemy reinforcements were expected to come.

As part of the contingency planning before the engagement, all the compañeros had been instructed to leave behind any documents or papers that might allow them to be identified. They did do this, although Nne's group kept some documents in their packs and were meant to leave their belongings at a certain distance before joining the ambush. When the fighting started, however, they still had their packs with them, and the enemy found a diary which suggested that Cubans had participated in the attack. What they did not know was that four had been killed at that place,[2] as the newspapers always spoke only of two.

A very large quantity of weapons and ammunition was hastily abandoned, but we could not know exactly how much because there had been no previous records. The wounded were left to their fate, as were the dead, of course.

Meanwhile, what was happening in Katenga?

One hundred and sixty men took part in the attack, with weapons greatly inferior to those of the Rwandans. The best they had were automatic rifles and short-range rocket launchers. The surprise factor was lost because, for reasons that Mundandi never explained, the attack had been ordered for a day later (the 30th), when enemy aircraft were flying over the whole region and those in defensive positions were naturally on the alert.

Of the 160 men, 60 had deserted by the time of the engagement and many others never managed to fire a shot. At the agreed hour, the Congolese opened fire on the barracks, generally shooting in the air because most of them kept their eyes shut while pressing the triggers of their automatic weapons until the ammunition ran out. The enemy answered with accurate 60 mm. mortar fire that inflicted a number of casualties and provoked an immediate rout.

The losses were four dead and 14 wounded, the latter during the disorderly retreat, in which men ran away in terror. At first they explained the defeat by saying that the medicine man was no good and had given them bad *dawa.* He tried to defend himself by blaming women and fear, but there were no women around and not a single man was honest enough to admit his weaknesses. The medicine man was in a tight spot and was replaced. It became the main task for Calixte, the group's commander, to search the entire zone for a new *muganga* with the right qualities.

The result of this dual attack was great demoralization among the Congolese and Rwandans, but also a loss of heart among the Cubans; our combatants had morosely witnessed assault troops melt away at the moment of combat and abandon precious weapons in order to flee more quickly; each had also observed the lack of comradeship as they left their wounded to fend for themselves, the terror that gripped the soldiers and the ease with which they dispersed without following orders of any kind. Often it was the officers—including the political commissars (a blot on the Liberation Army that I will discuss later), who were often the first to run away. The heavy weapons, which had mostly been handled by Cubans, were nearly all saved; the FM and DP machine guns, handled by Rwandans, were lost in significant numbers, as were rifles and all kinds of ammunition.

In the days after the attack, a large number of soldiers either deserted or requested a discharge. Mundandi wrote me a long letter, as always full of tales of heroism. He lamented the loss of his brother, but stated that he had

died after wiping out a truck full of soldiers (a complete fabrication because there were no trucks there). He regretted the loss of several of the more resolute cadres in his group, and protested at the fact that the General Staff was in Kigoma while the men were fighting and laying down their lives in the Congo. He mentioned in passing that two-thirds of the enemy troops had been killed, but he could not have had any reliable source for this and it was, of course, false. True to his inclination to fantasy, he could not refrain from making such assertions, while at the same time apologizing for his own weaknesses.

To sum up, Mundandi made a complete confession of his discouragement. I had to send him a reply replete with advice and an analysis of the situation in an attempt to lift his spirits. But his letters suggested the disintegration that would later overcome the Liberation Army and catch the Cuban troops in its mesh.

On June 30, when the engagement at Front de Force was already underway but no news of it had yet reached us, I wrote a monthly review in my diary:

> This is the most pathetic review so far. When everything seemed to suggest that a new period was opening for us, Mitoudidi died and the fog became denser. The exodus to Kigoma continues. Kabila has repeatedly announced his return but never carried it out; there is total disorganization.
>
> On the positive side is the idea of men going to the front; but on the negative side, there is the announcement of an attack that may be crazy or totally ineffective, and would alert Tshombe's forces.
>
> A number of questions remain to be clarified. What will be Kabila's attitude toward us, and especially toward me? In a word, is he the right man for this situation? Will he be able to size it up and see that everything here is chaotic? It's impossible to tell until we meet in the field, but on the first question at least, there are serious signs that he is not at all happy with my presence. It remains to be seen whether this is due to fear, envy or feelings hurt by the method.

During these days I wrote a letter to Pablo Rivalta, our ambassador to Tanzania, and among other things instructed him to inform the government of my presence here, to apologize for the way in which I had arrived, to explain the problems resulting from the fact that Kabila had not then been in the country, and to emphasize that the decision had been mine, not the Cuban government's. The bearer of the letter was first to meet Kabila in Kigoma and to discuss his views. But when he learned of my intentions, Kabila categorically forbade anything to be said, saying he would talk to me about it when he returned to the Congo.

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1. The diagram Che mentions was not in his original manuscript.

2. Those who died in this action were: Wagner Moro Pérez (Kawawa), Norberto Pío Pichardo (Nne), Víctor M. Valle Ballester (Thelathini) and Crisógenes Vinajera Hernández (Ansurune).

THE SHOOTING STAR

I received no fewer than four different verbal or written messages from Kabila before he arrived. I no longer believed anything despite all these promises, and focused my attention on a number of concrete problems.

From time to time Mundandi would write, each letter more critical than the last and all heaping blame on the Congolese: their lack of fighting spirit would leave him without men to make the revolution in Rwanda; all his cadres were dying; he had thought of continuing as far as Albertville before heading for Rwanda, but by then he would no longer have any combatants left, etc.

They had tried small-scale operations such as exploratory patrols at Front de Force to establish the enemy's location and to look for men who might have been abandoned by their compañeros as no one knew the exact numbers missing. But it was all to no avail, and the Rwandans refused to go farther than the first descending mountain slopes. Faced with our complaints, Mundandi explained that it was a political question and that his men were disheartened by the lack of cooperation from the Congolese and that's why they refused to act.

It was difficult to know what to make of these statements as one of his concerns had been to keep away from the Congolese troops. He had taken the initiative for the operation and its failure could be attributed to him, and maybe us, but there was no reason to implicate the Congolese from whom he kept his distance.

Wounded men kept arriving from Katenga and Front de Force. The peasants gradually brought them in because the combatants were also unwilling to carry someone on a makeshift stretcher along mountain paths.

Once again I tried to speak to those in charge. This was Major Kasali at that time, but he didn't receive me because he had a "headache," sending

Compañero Kiwe, an old acquaintance, to speak with me and pass on my views to Kigoma.

I didn’t have a lot to say:

a) What was being done with the 40 of our men who had recently arrived? Where were they being sent?

b) For the record I expressed my disagreement with the way everything for the attack on Bendera had been handled.

At the same time I gave him a brief letter for Kabila, explaining that my presence at the front was becoming daily more necessary.

Certainly, symptoms of the decomposition could be observed among our troop. Already during the retreat from Front de Force some compañeros were saying that they would no longer fight alongside such people and would withdraw from the struggle; it was rumored that some might formally propose to leave the Congo. Maintaining the morale of the Cubans was one of my fundamental concerns. I had requested an urgent reply to my note, but none arrived. I sent another letter via Commissar Alfred, in which I analyzed the defeat at Front de Force and added some further observations:

The attacks had not been coordinated; the Front de Force group attacked on the 29th and the Katenga group on the 30th, but Mundandi was not the only one to blame as nothing had been done on the other front either.[1] I recommended the creation of a single command to unify operations across the entire front, and suggested that a Cuban should be part of it. As we have seen, the conflicts made it impossible to transfer even a box of bullets from one group to another. I again insisted that it was necessary for me to be present at the front.

I went to the Upper Base to explain the defeat to our compañeros and to give the new arrivals a solemn warning. My analysis of our defects was as follows:

First, we are underestimating the enemy. We thought they would be like the rebel soldiers confronting them. So we attacked bare-chested in the spirit of conquerors, thinking we could just sweep the enemy aside, without taking into account that they had had military training and seemed to be on the alert in well-protected positions.

Second, lack of discipline. I emphasized the need for rigid discipline. Even though it was painful, it was necessary to criticize Nne's action, which, although heroic, had done a lot of damage by leading to the death not only of three other Cuban compañeros but also of more than a dozen Rwandans.

Third, decline of fighting spirit. I insisted emphatically that it was necessary to keep morale high.

I publicly criticized Compañero Azima for making defeatist statements, and I was explicit about what awaited us: not only hunger, bullets and all manner of suffering, but sometimes even death at the hands of compañeros who had no idea how to shoot. The struggle would be very hard and long. I gave this warning because, at that point, I was willing to accept that the new arrivals should express any doubts and return if they wanted; this would no longer be possible later. My tone was severe and my warning clear. None of the new arrivals showed signs of weakness, but to my surprise three combatants who had taken part in the attack at Bendera (and who had returned with messages) planned to leave. Even worse, one of them was a member of our party.[2] These were Abdallah, Anzali and Anga.

I reproached them for their attitude and warned that I would ask for the severest penalties against them. I made no commitment because I was speaking with the new soldiers in mind, but I did promise to let them go at an unspecified future date.

To exacerbate my pain and surprise, Compañero Sitaini, who had been with me since the [revolutionary] war [in Cuba] and served as my aide for six years, raised returning to Cuba. It was all the more painful because he used petty arguments and claimed not to know what everyone had been told about the expected length of the war, namely, that with luck, it was likely to last three years, or maybe five. It had been my constant refrain to predict a long and difficult struggle, and Sitaini knew this better than anyone because he was always with me. I refused to accept his departure. I tried to get him to see that it would harm the reputation of us all, and argued that he had an obligation to stay because of his closeness to me. He replied that this left him no choice but to agree, but he did so grudgingly and from then on he was like a walking corpse. He was ill with a bilateral hernia, and his

condition worsened so much that it became necessary and justifiable for him to abandon the struggle.

My spirits were very low during those days, but I cheered up on July 7 when I was told that Kabila had arrived. The top man was at last in the theater of operations.

He was cordial but reserved. I discussed my presence there as something that had been accepted as a *fait accompli* and merely repeated the explanations I had given several times before about why I had come to the Congo without giving advance notice. I told him that he should inform the Tanzanian government of this, but his response was evasive and the matter was left for another time. Two of his close assistants accompanied him: Compañero Massengo, today head of the General Staff, and Foreign Minister Nbagira (at that time there were two foreign ministers because Gbenyé had one of his own, Kanza). He appeared animated and asked me what I wanted to do. Of course, I repeated my old tune about wanting to go to the front. My most important task, in which I could be most useful, was to train cadres, and cadres were best trained in battle at the front line, not at the rear. He expressed his reservations, saying that someone like me was useful to the world revolution and should take care of himself. I argued that my intention was not to fight at the front, but to be at the front along with my soldiers. Besides, I had enough experience to take care of myself. I was not looking for laurels but carrying out a specific task, and I thought it the one most useful to him because it would result in loyal and competent cadres.

He did not reply, but he maintained a cordial tone and told me that we were going to make a number of trips; we would go to the interior and visit all the fronts, leaving that very night to visit the Kabimba area. For some reason, however, he was unable to go either that night or the next day, and on the day after that he had to speak at a rally about the Cairo conference and clear up some doubts the peasants had about it. For the moment, Aly was sent with 10 men to carry out some modest action in the Kabimba area. Lieutenant Kisua went to Uvira for the purpose of reconnaissance.

The rally proved to be interesting. Kabila showed ample knowledge of his people’s mentality as he explained skillfully and elegantly in Swahili all the salient points of the Cairo meeting and the resulting accords. He let the peasants talk, then gave quick responses in a way that satisfied them. At the

end, everyone did a short slow dance to the sound of music and sang, “Kabila eh! Kabila va!”

His activity was intense, as if he wanted to catch up for lost time. He proposed organizing the base’s defenses and he seemed to inspire everyone with fresh confidence, transforming this region that had been so badly affected by a lack of discipline. Sixty men were hastily assembled and assigned to three Cuban instructors in trench-digging and shooting, while we devised a plan to defend the little semicircular bay in which we found ourselves.

On July 11, five days after arriving, Kabila sent for me and said he had to leave that night for Kigoma. He explained that Soumialot was there, and then criticized that leader for his organizational errors, his demagogy and his weak character. According to Kabila, immediately after the Tanzanian government had, on his advice, imprisoned some of Gbenyé’s agents—or enemy agents—who had been sowing discord, Soumialot had shown up and released them. The division of labor with Soumialot had to be clarified once and for all; he had been appointed chairman so that he would spend his time traveling and explaining the revolution and not interfere too much—because he had no organizational skills—but now there needed to be a clearer demarcation.

Kabila assessed Soumialot’s influence in this, his native region, and said that they needed to sort things out between them because his activity could be harmful to the future of the revolution. The trip would last a day, and he would be back the following day.

In the course of our conversation, he let slip that Soumialot had already returned to Dar es-Salaam, so I asked him somewhat sarcastically how he was going to cross the lake, meet Soumialot in Dar es-Salaam and return the next day. But he replied that Soumialot’s departure had not been confirmed, and that if it was true and he had to go to Dar es-Salaam, he would return immediately.

When they heard that Kabila was leaving, the Congolese and Cubans again became dejected. Kumi, the doctor, took out a piece of paper on which he had predicted that Kabila would stay seven days in the Congo, just two days off. Changa, our valiant “admiral” of the lake, was furious: “Why did that man bring all those bottles of whiskey if he was only going to stay five days?”

I will not record what the Congolese said in protest as it was not said directly to me. But it was along the same lines, and it was transmitted to our own compañeros.

Kabila was becoming discredited, and it would be impossible to overcome this if he did not return at once. We had a final conversation in which I alluded to this problem as kindly as I could. We also discussed other matters, and he raised the question—obliquely, as usual—of what my position would be in the event of a split. I told him that I had not come to the Congo to interfere in internal politics and that it would be harmful if I were to do so; I said that I had been sent by our government to this region and that we would try to be loyal to him and above all to the Congo. If I had doubts about his political position, I told him I would present them to him first and frankly. But I stressed that wars are won on the battlefield, not in meeting rooms at the rear.

We spoke of future plans. He confided in me that he was arranging for the base to be moved further south to Kabimba, and that steps had to be taken to ensure that weapons were not distributed in the zones of his political enemies. I explained that, in our view, Katanga province's wealth made it the key area of the Congo and therefore where the toughest battles had to be fought. We agreed on this, but for our part we did not think that the problem of the Congo could be solved on a tribal or regional basis; it was a national problem and they had to understand this. I also argued that the loyalty of a particular tribe was not as important as the loyalty of revolutionary cadres; and cadres had to be trained and developed, insisting once again that it was necessary for me to be at the front… my usual refrain.

We said good-bye, Kabila left, and the very next day activity in the base, which had begun to improve through his dynamic presence, slackened off. Soldiers with the task of digging trenches said they would not work because the leader had left; others who were building the hospital also abandoned their labors. Again everything began to acquire the easy, pastoral rhythm that our General Staff headquarters had—the rhythm of a village far removed from all the vicissitudes of war and even life.

1. **Che's note:** It is necessary to stress this point because of the situation in which the Rwandans found themselves. On the one hand, greater confidence in and appreciation of them was shown than the Congolese; but, on the other hand, they got all the blame for the defeat. Both sides made no self-criticism and engaged in a war of incredible insults, using energy that would have been better expended on the enemy. Mundandi told me that on one occasion Calixte went as far as shooting at him, although I have no evidence of this. What is certain is that neither group was efficient.

2. This was the United Party of the Socialist Revolution that became the Cuban Communist Party in October 1965. It was at the public announcement of this new party's Central Committee that Fidel read Che's farewell letter in order to explain Che's absence from the committee. See: "On Che's Absence" in *Che: A Memoir* by Fidel Castro (Ocean Press).

WINDS FROM THE WEST, BREEZES FROM THE EAST

It was clear to me that something had to be done to halt the decomposition—a process that, paradoxically, had begun with the only offensive action we had seen the revolutionary movement undertake since our arrival. One thing led to another after the first Cubans proposed to withdraw from the struggle. Two more compañeros followed suit—Ahiri and Hamsini, one of them a party member—and shortly afterwards two doctors who had only just arrived, both party members, made the same request. I was less angry but far more cutting with the two doctors than with the ordinary soldiers, who were reacting to events in a more or less primitive manner.

It was obvious that the screening in Cuba was not satisfactory, but it is difficult to get it right in the present conditions of the Cuban revolution. You cannot base yourself only on a man's prior record under arms, for subsequent years of easier living can also change individuals. Besides, there's the huge majority that the revolution has transformed into revolutionaries. I still don't know how such a selection can be made without the test of fire, and I think that every measure must take into account the fact that no one can be finally approved until he has undergone selection on the battlefield. The reality was that, at the first serious setback, admittedly accompanied by a visible process of decomposition of the active forces, a number of compañeros lost heart and decided to withdraw from a struggle for which they had come to die if necessary—as volunteers—surrounded by a halo of bravery, self-sacrifice, enthusiasm, in short, invincibility.

What is the meaning of the soldier's cry, "Until death, if necessary!"? It bears the solution to the serious problems involved in creating our human beings of tomorrow.

Incredible things occurred among the Rwandans. Mundandi's second-in-command was shot, they say, but in reality brutally murdered. Thousands

of conjectures surround this event. The least favorable, which is not to say they are untrue, suggests it had something to do with skirts [women]. The result is that Commander Mitchel, a soldier and a peasant have all gone to a better life. The formal charge against him was that he transmitted bad *dawa* that was responsible for the death of 20 of his compañeros, but it was not specified whether the *dawa* directly caused their deaths or gave them inadequate protection, or whether operations outside the camp to find the *dawa* were the pretext on which he was denounced.

The incident was linked to other events at the same time, which it would have been good to investigate. It came after a serious defeat for which Mundandi held the main responsibility, but another man was shot instead. And the whole thing happened while there was a virtual rebellion against Kabila and the high command of the Liberation Army because the Rwandans, flatly refusing to carry out any military action, were either deserting or, in the case of those who remained at the camp, saying that they would go to fight only when they saw the Congolese doing the same. Even if Kabila were to come, they said they would give him food without salt and tea without sugar like they had so that he would understand what it was to make sacrifices. (This was hardly an effective threat because of course Kabila didn’t have the slightest intention of going there.)

A Congolese commissar at the front on the day this was happening tried to intervene but was simply blocked and forced to leave the camp. This commissar was Alfred (whom I’ve already mentioned), and he reacted by bluntly proposing either Mundandi was shot for murder, or I withdraw from the struggle.

Some Rwandans who had become close to us, and whom we had accepted as troops under Cuban discipline, were demoted and treated with hostility by their compatriots. This foreshadowed a cooling of relations, or something worse.

I discussed these problems with Massengo and stressed what, in my view, was the key point: that if the struggle was to be successful, we would have to integrate ourselves further into the liberation movement and come to be seen by the Congolese simply as soldiers who were just like them. Instead, we had been restricted to the circle of Rwandans, who not only were foreigners, but who stubbornly maintained their distinct status. In their company we were condemned to remain perpetual outsiders. In reply,

Massengo gave permission for some of our men to go and help Calixte in his work, which was quickly done.

Moja received instructions to organize fresh operations with any volunteers he could muster, but on condition that it should absolutely be a mixed force, with the same number of Cubans and Rwandans. We discussed with Mbili how to lay the ambush; my aim was for him to learn the basics of this type of warfare, and so he was ordered to attack only one vehicle in the first action.

This was set to take place on the road from Front de Force to Albertville, in an area scouted by Azi that had the right conditions for groups to harass the enemy or for a sizeable column to operate. There was thick forest on the mountainside, although it would be necessary to organize a supply system.

Aly arrived with news from the Kabimba front. On a reconnaissance trip, he had come across four enemy policemen on a mission to improve visibility by burning the nearby hills; three of them had been captured, while the fourth had been killed. Of the 20 Congolese who had been with Aly, 16 took to their heels when the action began. Only one policeman had been armed, the one who was killed. The soldiers' morale and combat readiness on this front was nothing to be envied by their colleagues at Front de Force or Calixte's front.

The base commander at Front de Force was now Captain Zakarias, and the plan was that he would join Mbili to carry out the action. Mundandi took quite a large force with him to the Lake Base; he looked dangerous, but in fact he was afraid and wanted to make sure he would be safe when he went to Kigoma to talk with Kabila. Soon he fell ill (genuinely ill) and took the usual month's vacation along with some of his most loyal men.

He visited me and was solicitous, almost humble. First, we talked about general problems of the offensive and then moved on to the matter of the murder.

He explained the death of those compañeros as follows: Commander Mitchel, confident of the friendship of some local inhabitants, had revealed the secret of the attack to them; one of them, however, was a spy who passed on the information to the enemy. When his compañeros found out, it was necessary to shoot them; he, Mundandi, had disagreed, but he was in a

minority at the meeting and had to carry out the wishes of the majority, given that the combatants were threatening to withdraw from the struggle.

I reviewed some aspects of the incident with him. First of all, the defeat should not be attributed to a betrayal, even if there had been one; it was due to flaws in the overall conception and execution of the attack, without denying that we might also carry some blame as a result of Nne's attitude. Citing examples from our own revolutionary war, I explained that it was highly negative to depend on soldiers' assemblies in cases such as this, that ultimately revolutionary democracy had never been applied in armies anywhere in the world, and that any attempt to implement it had ended in disaster. Finally, the shooting of a field commander who belonged to the Congo Liberation Army, without even informing the General Staff, and still less asking its views, was a sign of great indiscipline and complete lack of central authority; we all had to do what we could to ensure that such things never happened again.

When I made a remark to Massengo about the weakness of Mundandi's arguments, he replied that Mundandi had told him a different story but had been reluctant to speak frankly to me because in reality it was superstition that lay behind the drama.

Mundandi was called to a meeting with leaders from various areas to try to improve relations between their groups. This was attended by Mundandi as well as Captain Salumu, Calixte's second-in-command, and Compañero Lambert, the head of operations in the Fizi zone, and a bunch of aides.

Caught in the web of his lack of authority, Massengo could not extract himself from the crisis as the only way to do this would have been to wipe the slate clean and say: "I am in charge here!" That did not happen. Instead, the response was to maintain the independence of action of the different fronts with a plea that no such incident should be allowed to occur again, which left the problem unsolved and went right against my recommendation that a unified front should be formed under firm leadership.

Measures were taken to show firmness but were put into practice with a multitude of weaknesses. Massengo had a list of weapons supplied to the various fronts, and not one figure coincided with those given by the particular leaders. No one doubted that the weapons had actually been delivered, but assertions to the contrary were accepted and more military

equipment was thrown into the equipment-swallowing swamp of the fronts. A commission had been set up to retrieve weapons from the large number of deserters all over the region, who were now lording it over others with the persuasive power of rifles they had taken with them from the front. There was even talk of apprehending the parents of each man in question, if he could not be captured himself. But in the end no deserters were caught and no weapons recovered, nor, as far as I know, was any long-suffering peasant parent jailed.

When I told him of my intention to go to the front in a few days, Massengo refused and repeatedly invoked the excuse of my personal safety. I attacked him head-on, asking if he distrusted me in some way because the reasons he gave were not valid. I demanded that he should treat me with greater frankness and say if he had any misgivings about me. The blow was too direct and he gave way; it was left that we would make the trip together in five or six days' time, when a report would come from some inspectors he had sent to those places.

In reality, there were problems for the simple reason that neither Kabila nor Massengo had set foot on the various fronts for a very long time and the combatants were bitterly critical of them for this; the fact that the head of the Cuban expeditionary force could go and take part in life at the front, while those in charge of the war did not do the same, might have given them fresh reason to feel censorious. I was aware of this, but—apart from my concern to make a direct assessment of the situation—I also calculated that the Congolese leaders might feel forced to tour the fronts, and thus get to know and try to solve problems relating to the supply of food, clothing, medicine and ammunition.

To familiarize ourselves with every aspect of the area in preparation for our planned trip, we went with the chief of staff to Kazima, 27 kilometers north of Kibamba. There, too, we found the scenes of indiscipline that have been a recurrent theme in this account, although Massengo was able to take some correct measures such as the replacement of a commander who spent the day sheltering in nearby mountains (because he was terrified of aircraft) with the lieutenant who had been his deputy. Our own men, four machine gunners, were laid low with malaria, and we took them to Kibamba for treatment.

We had advanced deep into the political territory of General Moulana, and the reserve toward Massengo was reflected in the attitude of the local population and the combatants, who only reluctantly accepted what was meant to be a central authority.

We continued on to a place called Karamba. There we found one of the most original “barriers,” staffed by a group of Rwandans who were independent of Mundandi and had political-ideological differences with him that I would not know how to describe. They had set up a recoilless 75 mm. cannon on a hill—a pointless deployment because it had no strategic importance and all the artillery could do was sink a boat that might pass nearby. It had, of course, already fired some volleys without hitting the target because the artillerymen did not know how to handle it and, in any case, the boats kept away a sufficient distance to remain out of range. This was yet another piece of wasted equipment. I recommended its immediate transfer to Kibamba, where there were no artillery pieces and some men were being trained in how to use them; but this advice, as was so often the case, fell on deaf ears. It was not that Massengo did not understand such matters, but simply that he did not have the authority. He did not feel that he had sufficient force to impose decisions that went contrary to the established norms. A weapon that came into the hands of a group of combatants was held sacred, and the only ones who could snatch it away (rather easily, in fact) were the enemy.

Massengo wanted to turn the tide of events through offensive operations, and raised with me the idea of an attack on Uvira. I had to object to this because inspections of that area had revealed the same general conditions, the same basic unfamiliarity with military methods, and a total lack of combat readiness. The scouts in that area had instructions to cross enemy lines and investigate the possibility of laying ambushes on the other side of the little town of Uvira, at the tip of Lake Tanganyika where the roads from Bukavu, and from Bujumbura in Burundi, come to an end. The idea, then, was to cross to the other side of Uvira and break the enemy’s communications. Given the vast expanse of the Congo, it is quite easy to carry out such incursions. But not only was no one available to take our men across the lines, they were even being refused permission to go themselves, on the grounds that an attack was being prepared and they might alert the enemy.

While all these events were taking place, we received news from Dar es-Salaam—some of it good. A ship had arrived from Cuba with a cargo of weapons, provisions and 17,000 rounds of ammunition for our FAL rifles; it would be sent by road very soon. I learned that news of the Cubans killed in the Congo had appeared in all the newspapers, and that the ambassador had persuaded the Congolese formally to deny our presence there. This did not seem to me to be very wise because such things cannot be kept hidden and the only correct thing to do was to remain silent. I expressed my views to Pablo Rivalta.

Taking the letter for the ambassador and some other reports, two compañeros departed (Ottu, who had been ill for some time, and Sitaini, whose bilateral hernia had become a medical case). I now had the opportunity to release him and to end the annoying situation that his reluctance to be there with us had brought about; I found this painful, but it was the best solution. Those who "cracked" and were forced to remain against their will tried to justify themselves by making negative remarks, which found a ready echo among the other compañeros. In this case, Sitaini's illness justified his withdrawal, and that is why I allowed him to flee.

My Swahili teacher, Ernest Ilunga, whom I had come to regard as a younger brother, was also due to leave in a few days' time. He had had some epileptic-like seizures and the doctors suspected that a tumor was developing in his upper nervous system. Massengo disagreed and explained to me that it was a fairly simple matter of evil spirits and the local doctors would cure him in Kigoma. So that is where he went, rather than Dar es-Salaam, where he had been advised to go for a cure, or at least for a diagnosis.

Following instructions, Moja visited Calixte's front and sent me a report which I have included here because it sheds light on a number of issues:

> Tatu:
>
> I am writing to you from the Kozolelo-Makungu front, where a group of 10 men were sent. I reached them yesterday, having learned that a Congolese patrol had arrested a civilian with a Tshombe identity card in a settlement on the plain.

Today, the 19th [of July], I met Commander Calixte, who personally interrogated the prisoner; he is kept locked up in a house away from the front, and has not seen any of the Cubans.

According to Calixte, the prisoner told him that he had been under arrest in [Front de] Force at the time of the attack and that four officers had been killed there, with another two in Katenga, as well as a number of soldiers; he said he did not know the dead officers by name, but had been able to see their ranks and that the prisoner's identity card was not an army card but the kind issued to everyone going to Albertville; he also said that in Nyangi there were 25 guardsmen, a mortar and a cannon located on the road to Makungu; that the prison where they had gathered the attacking revolutionaries was a kilometer from [Front de] Force in the direction of Albertville; that the guardsmen had taken some of their watches and shoes, and that they had had to be buried by civilians.

Commander Calixte agrees that some men should be trained in the use of mortars, cannon and antiaircraft weapons, although he has none of these, and so we are waiting for the return of Captain Zakarias (Mundandi's replacement) to take these men to the [Front de] Force front.[1] Today, the compañeros at the Makungu front began to give classes to the rest of Commander Calixte's force. About Faume, I cannot yet tell you anything.[2] In a few days I'll send you more details about the situation—with a Cuban, as is natural for such details, and in a sealed envelope.

Moja

Soon afterwards, we got the best news of this period: the slight breeze. The ambush had gone off quite successfully: 25 Rwandans and 25 Cubans, led respectively by Captain Zakarias and Mbili, but in reality under the latter's leadership, had carried out the engagement, if it can be called that.

Azi's inspection had shown that the trucks passed there in single file, without protection. The 50 men attacked a truck with five soldiers. A bazooka round from Sultán opened the proceedings, and for a few minutes

the vehicle and the mercenaries (all of them black) were riddled with bullets. Only one was carrying a weapon as the truck was transporting food, cigarettes and drinks. From the point of view of a gradual preparation for large-scale actions, the prize couldn't have been better—but a number of accidents marred the achievement.

When the shooting began, the Rwandans ran backwards firing their weapons. This put our men in danger, and in fact Compañero Arobaini lost a finger when a bullet crushed the metacarpus of one hand.

Two examples give some idea of the primitive mentality that still holds sway in the Congo. When Captain Zakarias learned of the wound caused by the FM fire, he examined it and decreed that the guilty man should lose two of his fingers, in accordance with the principle of an eye for an eye; he took out his knife there and then and would have cut off the poor man's fingers if Mbili had not very tactfully persuaded him to forgive the man. The other example is of a Rwandan soldier who started to run away as soon as he heard gunfire (our own fire, as there was no combat); since each Rwandan was accompanied by a Cuban, our man in question caught him by the arm to hold him back, and the terrified kid, in order to shake off an attacker who was stopping him from protecting himself, gave the Cuban a tremendous bite on the hand.

These were two indications of the long road we would have had to travel to make an army out of this shapeless mass of men. Unfortunately, the tragicomedy of this ambush did not end there. After the first moments of stupor, the brilliant victors realized that the greatest prize was on top of the truck: bottles of beer and whiskey. Mbili tried to load the food and destroy the alcohol, but this proved impossible. Within a few hours all the combatants were drunk, under the astonished and disapproving gaze of our men who were not allowed any of the alcohol. Later they held a meeting and decided they would not return to the plain for the other actions, as had been planned, but would return to base—they had done enough already. In a diplomatic attempt to avoid being left with only the Cubans, Mbili accepted the decision. On the way back, a drunken Captain Zakarias ran into a peasant and finished him off with a few shots, claiming that he had been a spy.

Most curiously, when I explained to Massengo how dangerous it was to behave in this way with the peasants, he tried to defend Zakarias on the

grounds that the tribe living in this region was hostile to the revolution. It is worth noting that people were not seen as individuals, but rather in terms of their tribe— a concept from which it was very difficult to escape; when a tribe was friendly, all its members were friendly; and vice versa when it was hostile. Apart from not helping the revolution to develop, such schemas were also clearly dangerous because—as we saw later—some members of the friendly tribes were enemy informers, and in the end nearly all of them became our enemies.

We had had our first taste of victory, and it was as if it had rid us of some of the previous bad taste. But the problems posed by the things I have described were accumulating in such a way that I was beginning to change my time frame. If everything depended on the development of these armed groups into a fully fledged Liberation Army, then five years was a very optimistic target for the Congolese revolution to reach a victorious conclusion, unless something changed in the way the war was conducted. But that possibility seemed more remote with every passing day.

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1. **Che's note:** Captain Zakarias refused to accept Congolese at his front because he said they stole things in his camp.

2. **Che's note:** We heard that, due to some friction between them, Commander Faume had split away from Calixte and was on the plain with a lot of weapons. At the time, we were seeking capable leaders among the Congolese.

BREAKING LOOSE

As was my usual habit, I made an analysis of the previous month (July) in my field diary:

> A slight improvement on what has occurred to date. Kabila came, stayed for five days, and departed, which exacerbated the rumors about him. He doesn't like my presence, but he seems to have accepted it for the moment. So far, nothing makes me think he is the man for the situation. He lets the days go by without concerning himself with anything other than political squabbles, and appears to be too addicted to drink and women.
>
> At the military level, since the disaster at Front de Force and the near-disaster at Katenga, there have been some small successes worth noting: two minor engagements at Kabimba, the ambush at Front de Force, the other one at Katenga where a bridge was set on fire. At the same time, some training has begun and a search is on for men of a higher caliber at the other fronts. The appalling method continues of throwing weapons all over the place, without any order or coordination. My impression is that progress can be made, though at a slower pace and there is a chance Kabila might let me do something. For the moment, I'm still the scholarship boy.

We got news of an ambush at Katenga. The men stayed there for four days and withdrew because the guardsmen did not come along the road. Before leaving, they burnt and destroyed a bridge. My monthly analysis [above] refers to this action.

The terrible thing is that the same situation of indiscipline and lack of fighting spirit were observed in this area.

Azi arrived from Front de Force with 14 men, all Cubans, to find the food necessary for the laying of another, slightly more ambitious ambush. Given the conditions in the area, they needed to take some food with them. The supply of provisions had been one of the sore points for the soldiers in the field. In the area where they had their permanent camps, it was possible to find some meat and cassava (the staple food), but the major plantations of this root are located on the plain, where the peasants who grew it lived. It was only the depredations of enemy soldiers that forced them to leave and take refuge in the less hospitable highlands. To find cassava, it was necessary to make long and somewhat dangerous incursions down to the plain and it was the Cubans who started these raids because the Rwandans systematically refused, arguing that the high command had a duty to supply them with food. There were even days when there wasn't enough food, and then they refused to attend the classes on heavy weapons or do any kind of preparatory work, such as antiaircraft defense or trench-digging. The phrase they used—another of the clichés we had to suffer during our time in the Congo—was "*Hapana chakula, hapana travaille,*" meaning something like, "No food, no work".

Three new compañeros, Sita, Saba and Bahati, asked to return to Cuba. I was extremely hard on them, refusing point-blank to consider their transfer but ordering them to remain in the base for supply duties.

On August 6, we heard that Gbenyé had been removed by Soumialot. Two days later, Massengo came to tell me that he had been summoned by Kabila to Kigoma and would return the next day. We discussed all the external problems of the movement, and I mentioned I knew Gbenyé had been removed by the Revolutionary Council. He said that, in his view, Soumialot did not have the authority to decree such a measure, but he would discuss all these things with Kabila and he would give me a better explanation of what had happened.

Massengo left, and the next day the group that was undergoing training at the Lake [Base] was dissolved. This was the same group that had suffered great losses in numbers and morale on the day after Kabila's departure; work had stopped, the trenches had been left half-dug, and we had acknowledged their spirit of combat and organization when the appearance of a small enemy boat raised the alarm. It had been impossible to form a second line of defense, as planned, because there were no combatants to do

it, while in the first line a number of the platoon leaders were absent. A precarious line had been formed with some volunteers who came forward, in the half-dug and already half-collapsed trenches. Now, with Massengo gone, the group vanished into the pandemonium of Kibamba.

Arguments broke out again because no one recognized the authority of the substitute officers. It occasionally came to blows, or guns or knives would be flashed for a while. In one disgraceful incident, an officer in charge sought refuge in the Cubans' house because a soldier had asked him for rice and, when refused, had threatened him with a cocked gun and sent him running to the "temple" of the (fortunately respected) Cubans. I think the soldier got his rice, and in any case there was no disciplinary sanction. Such was the demoralization that spread as soon as the top leaders left the headquarters of the General Staff.

To avoid contamination, I removed the useful Cubans out of the camp and left only those who had asked to return to Cuba, along with the lakeside machine-gunners, the sick and some instructors. I planned to wait a few days and, if nothing happened during that time, to head straight for the front without begging for further authorization.

From the tone of some notes and various conversations with compañeros, I began to suspect the meaning behind certain phrases. In the reports on some military or reconnaissance activity, after the failure of the operation was registered, the explanation appeared: "The Congolese refused to go"; "The Congolese refused to fight"; "The Congolese, etc." In analyzing this, as well as the tension between those who planned to abandon the struggle and those who remained, I drafted a "Message to the Combatants," to be read at the fronts where we had troops. The maelstrom of the following months, and the instability of my situation, having to go from one place to another, prevented me from issuing any other messages, although I don't know if my words had any effect. I will transcribe here the only one that was read and which gives an idea of the situation up to that point and my views about the problems we were facing.

Message to the Combatants

Compañeros:

In a few days, for some of us, it will be four months since we arrived in these lands, and a brief analysis of the situation must be made.

We cannot say that the situation is good. The leaders of the movement spend most of their time outside the country, which may be understandable in the case of political leaders whose work encompasses many facets, but never in the case of middle-level cadres. Nevertheless these middle cadres travel just as often and spend weeks outside the country, setting a terrible example. There is virtually no organizational work, precisely because the middle-level cadres don’t do the work and don’t know how to do it, and on top of that, nobody trusts them.

Local leaders blackmail middle-level cadres whose tasks are similar to those of the General Staff, and receive weapons and ammunition without any proof that they will use them properly. More weapons are given to more people who lack training and a fighting spirit, and there is almost no progress in organization. The picture is completed with indiscipline and a lack of self-sacrifice being the main characteristics of all the guerrilla troops. Obviously, a war is not won with such troops.

It’s questionable whether anything positive has come out of our presence. But I think there has been something positive. Many of our difficulties, including my own virtual imprisonment here, stem from the notable differences between the various troops and from fear of conflicts between one leader and another. Our mission is to help them win the war; we should make the most of this negative reaction and convert it into something positive. This requires a greater stress on our political work. We have to show the differences through our own example, but without making ourselves the object of hatred by cadres who might see us as the inverted image of all their faults.

For this, we must first try to exercise genuinely revolutionary comradeship among the rank-and-file from where the middle-ranking leaders of tomorrow will emerge. Generally, we have more clothing and more food than the compañeros here; we should share as much as possible, selectively, with those compañeros who show

revolutionary spirit while setting an example at the same time. Our experience must be transmitted in one form or another to the combatants; the urge to teach should be paramount—but not in a pedantic manner, looking down at those who don't know, but with the human warmth that comes with shared learning. Revolutionary modesty should guide our political work and should be one of our basic weapons, complemented by a spirit of sacrifice that is an example not only to the Congolese compañeros but also to the weakest among ourselves. We should never check to see whether our own position is more dangerous than someone else's or whether more is being demanded of us; more should be asked of a genuine revolutionary because he has more to give. Finally, we should not forget that we know only a fraction of what we should know. We have to learn about the Congo in order to bind ourselves to the Congolese compañeros; but we also have to learn the things we lack in general culture and even the art of warfare, without thinking that we know everything there is to know or that it's all we need to know.[1]

I would like to conclude this message with a couple of warnings:

1) Behavior among compañeros. Everyone knows that a group of compañeros, by proposing to abandon the struggle, dishonored their word as revolutionaries and the trust placed in them. There can be no justification for this, and I will request the most severe moral sanctions against those compañeros. But we should not forget something else: they are not traitors, and they should not be treated with open contempt. Let's be clear. Of everything a revolutionary can do, their actions are the most open to criticism. But you have to be a revolutionary in the first place, otherwise it would not be so serious but simply an escape by anyone else. Today these compañeros are being cold-shouldered, and they have united among themselves as a defensive measure to justify something that cannot be justified. But they still have to spend some months here; if we take advantage of the shame they surely feel (however much they hide it) and show comradeship we may save a few to share our fate here—which is a thousand times preferable, whatever else may

happen, to the fate of the moral deserter. Without forgetting their faults, let's show them a little warmth and not force them to justify themselves as a defense against rejection.

2) It is evident in some reports, and especially in the expressions used by compañeros, that you feel contempt for the attitude of the Congolese compañeros in battle. There are two problems with this. The first is that the Congolese are aware of this; if you watch two people speaking in one of their languages that you do not understand you will see how they are speaking about you and get the sense of what they are saying. One scornful gesture can ruin 40 positive actions. On the other hand, the Congolese can turn into a *toti*;[2] there are signs that the attitude of the Congolese is being exaggerated, which may provide a justification for not carrying out a particular task. Our primary function is to educate people for combat, and if there is no real coming together this will not happen. The education should concern not only ways of killing a person but also, indeed, above all, the attitude one should have to the sufferings of a long struggle. This is achieved when the teacher can be taken as a model for the students to follow. Don't forget this, compañeros, and don't forget either that if any veteran of our war of liberation says that he never ran away you can say to his face that he is lying. We all ran and went through dark periods when we were frightened of shadows. It is a stage that you have to help people overcome—and, of course, the conditions are more difficult here in terms of the development of consciousness because the level of development is much lower than ours was in those days.

This message should be discussed among the party members and any suggestions communicated to me. Then it should be read out to the compañeros and then immediately burned; it should not remain at the front. It will not be read out in those places where some compañeros are giving up the struggle.

Revolutionary greetings to everyone,

Tatu
August 12, 1965

As neither Massengo nor Kabila turned up within the time I had set for myself, I went to the Upper Base on the 16th and left for Front de Force at dawn on the 18th, arriving there in the evening after a long, seemingly interminable hike through the plain that separated these two points. I felt rather like an escaped delinquent, but I had resolved not to return to the base for a long time.

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1. The ideas expressed in this “Message to the Combatants” are consistent with Che’s ideas on the guerrilla struggle and its political dimension, both as the setting for the transformation of individuals and the social change that is being sought. It heralds the new society and the new human being. In this case, the political aspect was augmented because this was an experience under the banner of internationalism, the highest expression of solidarity between human beings. “This type of [international] struggle gives us the opportunity to become revolutionaries, the highest form of the human species, and it also allows us to emerge fully as men,” he would write on August 8, 1967, in his *Bolivian Diary* (Ocean Press).

2. A reference to a saying used in certain situations when a person for some reason is blamed for actions that in reality most or all people do.

SCATTERING SEEDS

I had only just reached Front de Force and thrown myself on the ground to enjoy my overpowering exhaustion, when the compañeros began with their complaints about the attitude of the Rwandans, especially Captain Zakarias, who was inflicting corporal punishment on his men and who, they had no doubt, was capable of killing someone. Our reception, however, had been cordial enough. The site chosen for the camp was at the edge of a mountain that rose from a gorge above hilly natural pastures which, in this dry period, were bare of grass. By day the temperature was pleasant, but at night it was very cold and a fire was needed when you went to sleep. To protect myself from the rigors of the climate, I lay on a hide very close to the fire. I slept well, but immediately fell prey to one of the local fiends, the *birulo,* a louse that lives mainly in clothing and roams freely all over this region of relatively temperate climate and zero hygiene.

From the heights of our camp, it was possible to make out the town of Bendera and its electrical installations. As I saw it spread out before me, I realized how foolish it had been to consider a frontal attack. At our present level of strength, it was quite impenetrable.

The latest news completed our general picture of the various fronts in this eastern sector of the struggle in the Congo. Although many more weapons had been distributed, the quantities actually available were as follows:

At Uvira, roughly 350, plus one piece of artillery, a few antiaircraft machine guns and a mortar.

In the vast region of Fizi, including Baraka, the number of armed men was between 1,000 and 2,000, largely scattered among the local settlements. There were some antiaircraft weapons, one artillery piece and a few mortars.

At Lulimba, we assessed that Lambert could count on 150 rifles, three antiaircraft batteries, one piece of artillery and two mortars. Farther along the Kabambare road, Lambert had another small force with about 45 men, some light weapons and bazookas.

Various other groups were scattered along the Kabambare road, supposedly as far as Kasengo; most of them had only a few weapons—just a small number of rifles. There, too, the authority of the General Staff was treated with scorn. One of our men personally overheard a discussion with someone sent from the Lake [Base], in which another person from the plains said that those who remained were unarmed and those who had escaped to the refuge of the mountains had all the weapons.

Between Lulimba and [Front de] Force, there were other detachments that we did not know much about: the one at Kalonda-Kibuyu apparently had some 60 weapons at that time; the group at Mukundi had roughly 150; the famous Faume, who was almost a legendary figure because he could never be found, also had 150 or so. Then there were the two groups in the mountains: Calixte with 150 weapons; while Mundandi had managed to get some 300, with three machine guns, two artillery pieces and two mortars, although by now the number was much reduced because of the desertions, which usually involved the loss of guns and equipment.

In the south, at Kabimba, there were approximately 150 weapons, two antiaircraft machine guns, one artillery piece and two mortars. And there was a profusion of weapons washed by the waters of the lake, including rifles, a number of antiaircraft guns, some reserve mortars and a piece of artillery whose original emplacement I mentioned before.

We heard satisfying news from Mbili’s ambush. This time there was more booty, but they were not able to complete the action because some peasants were traveling along the road at the time and might have seen evidence of some strange group and run off to report them at Front de Force, a few kilometers away. When it became clear that the peasants had spotted the ambush and fled, Mbili ordered everyone to remain alert and reinforced the positions on the Front de Force side, preparing to move by night if nothing else happened. At 10:00 a.m., however, a jeep with an armored car escort came along the road from Albertville; Sultán was again responsible for opening fire, and he damaged the first vehicle and destroyed it with a second round. Compañero Afendi, at a distance of barely 10

meters, destroyed the jeep with a bazooka round, fragments from which injured both Afendi and Alakre. The compañeros at the rear blew up the second armored car with hand grenades (these are armored open vehicles, with a machine-gunner in a kind of turret, an aide and a driver). In all they counted seven dead—including some with fair skin whom Mbili thought might be North Americans, but were later discovered to be Belgian. As they were going to collect all the equipment, enemy troops arrived from Front de Force, evidently having been tipped off by the peasants, and shooting began at one end of the ambush. The men had to withdraw at once and were unable to retrieve the documents and weapons from the vehicles. Some lost their way at first but turned up again later. Only one Rwandan did not return to base, and since the imperialist news agencies that gave the correct figure of seven dead among the mercenaries spoke of one guerrilla dead, it is logical to assume that he was hit by a stray bullet.

It would have been very handy to have obtained the documents because we later learned from two prisoners picked up on the road that those men had been assigned to make special plans for Front de Force, and probably also to devise a general plan of attack, or reconnoiter the area to achieve this. The jeep had pulled a little trailer, the contents of which were not identified. It might have been electrical equipment for microwaves, or it might have contained documents. Everything suggests that those killed in this incident were pretty big fish, so any documentation would have been very valuable.

As before, the Rwandans proposed to return immediately because of the lack of food, but Mbili had learned his lesson and said that he and his people (the Cubans) were staying to the end and, after a long meeting, the Rwandans decided to stay as well. We had sent some food from the camp, and they had managed to kill an elephant—there are quite a few in that region—so they were not devastated by hunger.

After the usual meetings, a new location was chosen for a second ambush. But we only captured two traders traveling on bicycle paths with food and two big jugs of *pombe.* (Mbili immediately dumped the liquor in order to avoid scenes like those that occurred after the earlier engagement.) Once again peasants had spotted the ambush and headed off in the direction of Front de Force, so it was agreed with the Rwandans to lift the ambush

and return to base. Before leaving, they attempted to bring down the power lines with a bazooka round but failed.

I went to greet the people as they climbed up the steep slopes with high spirits and higher morale; the Rwandans had conducted themselves much better and, although there had again been no fighting because the Belgians had been taken completely by surprise, many of the combatants had stayed and done their share of the shooting. Then I met with Captain Zakarias. Although our interviews were not very cordial, his attitude began to change. They were holding the two traders captive, and as they were related to each other, I suggested keeping one hostage and sending the other to help our people establish some contact in Albertville. But Zakarias disagreed, saying they might be spies, and in the end they were sent to the Lake Base. They tried to escape, and at least one suffered a horrible death at the hands of his guards.

I sent another note to Massengo in which I stressed the need for an intelligent and consistent approach toward the peasants, so that we could avoid the kind of problems encountered at these ambushes. I proposed starting intelligence work with prisoners, and I also suggested that we involve the peasants in a plan for supplying the front and reward them with part of the goods they brought as the route from the lake was still open. At the same time, I stressed the need for a single command at the front; the dispersion of independent forces was unacceptable, especially given the tendency to anarchy and rivalry that led to extremes of violence among one or other of the groups.

We were convinced that the Rwandans, despite their recent progress, were unable to give much more and that we had to focus our training more on the Congolese, who, after all, had to liberate the Congo. It was decided, therefore, to leave Compañero Maffu behind in charge of 12 men, so as not to hurt the Rwandans' feelings, and to send the rest of the troops to Calixte's front, where I would also go for the time being. Before we left, it was further decided that Tom should make a political inspection at the Lake [Base], and then go on to Kabimba to clarify the situation there, as I had some reservations about how Compañero Aly was behaving in terms of his relations with the Congolese.

Before Tom left, we had a party meeting where we again analyzed all the problems and elected some members to help the political commissar in

his tasks. Ishirini and Singida were unanimously chosen to be part of the group that would continue with us, and Arasili to join the small group that would remain with Maffu. Three great guys. We did, however, criticize Compañero Singida at the meeting for certain violent outbursts against the Congolese, and from the General Staff I criticized Azi and Azima for their incorrect treatment of the Rwandans.

Before we left for Calixte's front, the Rwandans asked for a meeting with me that was attended by Captain Zakarias, the party organization secretary, the youth leader and a couple of others. We spoke about general issues of the war, such as the conduct of military operations and training and other practical problems. At the end, the organization secretary asked me to evaluate critically the work of the Rwandans up to that time, and I pointed to what I saw as two weaknesses:

First, the fatalistic attitude to food. The Rwandans depended on the peasants to bring them cattle; the most they did was send some soldiers to look for food. (They had started to eat monkey meat—which can vary from tasty to merely edible as one's hunger decreases—and, apart from the last few days, they had been incapable of going to find cassava on the plains.) I explained that it was necessary for the people's army to be self-sufficient, in permanent communion with the people and not be a parasite. On the contrary, it had to be a mirror in which the peasants could look and see themselves.

Second, the excessive lack of trust in the Congolese. I urged them to unite with the Congolese, arguing that the outcome of the struggle in Rwanda depended on the result of the struggle in the Congo because the latter involved a broader confrontation with imperialism.

In response, they accepted the first criticism and gave some examples of how they were mending their ways; but they did not broach the second point, which suggested that they did not agree with my remarks, or at least that they were not prepared to change their attitude.

Messengers arrived from the base, bringing letters from Dar es-Salaam and various pieces of news. A letter from Pablo explained some important points. It is dated August 19, 1965.

Tatu:

The trip was planned as you ordered,[1] but a change was made because of a cable from Havana saying that a messenger was being sent here. The messenger is here, preparing for and making sure of the crossing, and will be with you soon.

A couple of matters: A group of men are going there to organize a training base, where it will be possible to train compañeros from Mozambique and from other movements in the region. This group was originally requested by the Tanzanian government for the purpose of instructing the Mozambicans and to carry out an action that Osmany will probably have explained to you. But due to special circumstances, the plans were postponed and a request was made for the group to go to Tabora to take charge of a base there in order to train Congolese. But now, with Soumialot's agreement, they plan for the base to be inside the country, so they don't have to take personnel outside and so they can also use it to train Mozambicans and members of other liberation movements in the region.

The other matter refers to various groups of Congolese who have visited me in the last few days and who know you in one way or another. Using the pretext that Kabila does not want to get involved, they are trying to work on their own. This is no more than a wish on their part, reflecting a little ambition to command and they want to use you and our men as a cover to create their own group. I explained to them this was dangerous as it tends to divide the movement, and that to carry out any activity they must first discuss it with Kabila and yourself. I said we have made a commitment to work in this way.

Kabila visited us and explained the situation, saying that he had expelled these compañeros and had spoken to the Tanzanian government so that, whenever anyone shows up claiming to be a combatant, he should be sent there. He also explained the situation to the embassies that these compañeros had visited.

He departed promising that he would go there himself.

Warm regards,

Pablo

I answered Pablo saying that, although I didn't have confidence in Kabila, all the others there were worse—they were not even intelligent and besides it was necessary to hitch ourselves to Kabila's wagon. Kabila should be given assurances that we would work honestly to consolidate unity under his command; he should have no fears on that score. I expressed my reservations about the order to send instructors to create a base here because men from other movements would be so distressed to see the indiscipline, disorganization and complete demoralization that it would be a very cruel shock for anyone coming to be trained in the tasks of liberation. I told Pablo I hoped that the initiative had not come from him because it was politically dangerous.

We set off for Calixte's camp, leaving behind the men as we had agreed along with Moja plus a few others to wait for Zakarias, who had left on a supply mission. He had promised to bring 10 men to take part in an action alongside the Congolese, and we waited for him, hoping he would keep his word.

Calixte's camp is two-and-a-half hours away by foot, at the end of the mountain chain where it drops down to the plains; it cannot be surpassed from the point of view of defense as the bare and extremely steep slopes make it easy to block access just with rifle fire. The camp consisted of little straw huts that could accommodate four to 10 people in cane bunks. We were allocated a few unoccupied ones. The place was more comfortable and less cold than Bendera, but it had the same number of lice.

Calixte was about to leave for Lulimba having been summoned by Lambert. He greeted me cheerfully enough and said he was glad we had come, but he wasn't happy we had brought the Rwandans along. I explained that we had carried out orders by training this group, but that we wanted to work with him. Our conversation was amicable, although we could not have the same direct communication that we had had with the Rwandans; Calixte did not speak a word of French and my Swahili was still far from perfect, so we had to rely on Cuban translators who did not appreciate every shade of meaning. It was very difficult to give complicated explanations.

From the camp we looked down on the whole plain close by, the settlements of Makungu, Nyangi and Katenga, and even Front de Force. I told Calixte it was necessary to get closer to keep harassing the guardsmen and temper our troops, and I suggested that this should be done

immediately. He agreed, and I sent a group led by Azi to explore the area provisionally based in a village some four kilometers from Makungu. We prepared to go down at once with the help of Calixte's second-in-command, the temporary base commander, who called his men together and struggled against their reluctance to confront the enemy.

Taking advantage of the fact that it was a Sunday, the peasants held a party in our honor before we left; men were dressed in wood demon's clothes, or something similar, and performed ritual dances and everyone went to pay worship to the idol, a simple stone placed near the top of the mountain and surrounded with a reed circle that was sprinkled occasionally with the blood of a sacrificial animal. In this case it was a lamb, which everyone present then ate. The ritual seems complicated, but in essence it is extremely simple: sacrifice is made to the god, the stone idol, and the sacrificed animal is then consumed as people take the opportunity to eat and drink plentifully.

The peasants were extremely friendly toward us, and I felt very much in their debt so that I returned to my old profession as a doctor, reduced under the circumstances to the bare minimum of penicillin injections against gonorrhea, the local disease, and tablets against malaria.

Again we began the fatiguing task of teaching the basic elements of warfare to people whose commitment was not obvious, in fact, we seriously doubted they had any commitment at all. In this way we desperately scattered seeds around us in the hope that some would germinate before the bad times came.

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1. **Che's note:** This refers to the instruction to travel every fortnight from Dar es-Salaam; this was never carried out.

ATTEMPTING “PURSUIT”

With a new bunch of aspiring guerrillas in the Makungu area, we tried to resume the little classes in ambush that we had given on the road from Albertville to Front de Force. The troop became more heterogeneous when Captain Zakarias arrived with 10 more Rwandans; we would try to draw them closer in order to establish a united front.

Enemy troops were located at several places: Front de Force, three or four hours on foot from our camp; opposite us at Nyangi, two hours away at Katenga, and 50 kilometers away at Lulimba. Our objective was to attack on the Katenga-Lulimba road and stop them if they tried to advance from Nyangi. The latter is a village on an abandoned road closer to the mountains, where Makungu is situated and we had our headquarters. Katenga is on the new road that has modern bridges able to withstand flooding rivers.

We assigned Azi and a group of six Cubans and 10 Congolese to stopping any forces that might advance from Nyangi. The attack on the road would involve some 40 Congolese, 10 Rwandans and 30 Cubans—more than enough to eliminate any enemy forces that might come along.

A group of 10 Cubans had recently arrived who, it was thought at first, could be the instructors at an international training base not only for Congolese but also Africans from other movements. But given the conditions, we had seen that it was impossible to keep a stable group studying these arts, so we decided to incorporate the instructors into the struggle beginning with this next action. It was not a particularly strong reinforcement because the compañeros had an education in the theory, in order to give more or less orthodox instruction in weapons, but with a few exceptions, they lacked experience in guerrilla combat.

I personally accompanied the combatants. After crossing the Kimbi River, which during the rainy season has a very strong current, but at this

time we could cross easily in waist-high water, we established ourselves in the area we had selected.

Our tactics were simple: The center of the ambush was the strongest point and was where the brunt of the fighting would occur. We had enough men on both sides to stop any part of a convoy so large that some of it might remain outside the main ambush, and to prevent any enemy troops from escaping—although ideally they would have no chance to defend themselves because of the surprise factor. As usual, we would begin firing with rocket launchers. A small group five or six kilometers down the road to Katenga had the task of wrecking a wooden bridge after the trucks had passed and fallen into the ambush to prevent their escape and the arrival of reinforcements. Moreover, as our lack of detonators (which never arrived) made it impossible to use anti-tank mines directly, we placed one on a little wooden bridge two or three meters wide in the center of the ambush and attached a grenade fuse and a piece of cord so that it would explode within five or six seconds. The device was unreliable because its detonation at the right moment depended on the skill of the user and the speed of the passing truck, so we kept it as a last resort in case other elements failed.

I established the little command post by a well some 500 meters away from the ambush. In actions like this, you must consider your supply of water and food because you may have to wait days and days for the vehicles to come along. The water was stagnant and dirty and, despite our use of disinfectants, many combatants came down with diarrhea during our time there; the food was not varied but it held out, because the ambush was right in the middle of a neglected mountain of cassava, with giant roots that had been growing for years and years, tough but edible if you were really hungry. Rain made our stay less pleasant. But on the first and second days there were no significant difficulties; the men were both tense and bored as the hours passed interminably, but at the same time any noise breaking the silence became the sound of an engine and immediately put everyone on alert. Even I, several hundred meters from the frontline, repeatedly suffered these aural hallucinations.

Until Sunday, the fifth day of our wait, we managed to keep control of the men. Then the Congolese began to show signs of impatience, inventing supposed information that trucks came here only once every fortnight, adding that because the last convoy had passed the day before we laid the

ambush, it would be best to pack up and return later. They did not insist too much, however, despite the fact that the enforced idleness, the foul water and the cassava diet, occasionally varied with a tiny amount of canned food or *bukali,* did nothing to boost the combatants' morale. On the fifth day, a comical event again exposed our weaknesses. While I was lying lazily in my hammock at the command post, I heard a sound like that of stampeding elephants; the six or seven Congolese in charge of the food said to me with bulging eyes, *"Askari Tshombe, askari Tshombe"* (Tshombe soldiers). They had seen them right there, some 20 or 30 meters from their position. I had scarcely had time to throw on my battle gear, leaving my hammock and backpack to their fate, when one of the Cubans with me also saw the *"askari Tshombe."* The situation grew more complicated, for I couldn't rely on the Congolese and I had only four Cubans with me, one of them Singida, who was sick, but I quickly sent him to Moja for reinforcements. I also got him to remove the Congolese, who in these circumstances were more of a hindrance, and walked a few meters toward the river to get beyond the strip of land visible to the enemy. Following those who were on their way back, I intended to withdraw along the same road after making contact with the guardsmen, but shortly after heard that the people spotted were not enemy soldiers but local peasants, who had fled at the sight of us and one of our men had gotten a good look at them from afar.

We were discussing these events when a scout sent by Moja arrived to find out what was happening. He approached us from behind, overheard us talking, and ran off to report that the guardsmen had already captured the command post and taken it. There was total confusion as it appeared that the ambushers had been ambushed. Moja, who was directly in command of the action, immediately called off the ambush and took refuge nearby, giving orders to search for me in the direction of the Kimbi River, where I had supposedly gone.

We were still meandering around after a couple of hours but some of the Congolese took advantage of the situation to go back to the camp and did not return. We suffered several losses like this as a result of the confusion. The infantile reaction of the Congolese, who ran off like badly behaved kids, was compounded by the mistakes of some of our compañeros with less battle experience.

We decided to move the site of the ambush a few hundred meters, as the peasants had seen us and we didn’t know which group they belonged to. I had to return to the camp, as I learned that Compañero Aragonés was on his way. The ambush lasted 11 days, September 1-11, and several times, when the Congolese argued more and more insistently to leave, Moja had to say that he would remain with only the Cubans—although because of this attitude, the Congolese stayed at their posts.

Finally the trucks turned up, just two of them. The first was destroyed, seven or eight soldiers were killed and the same number of rifles captured; they were carrying nothing but their weapons, a large amount of marijuana and some unimportant papers, except for the Lulimba payroll. The second vehicle was not destroyed because the bazooka failed to fire, and the occupants (more than in the first vehicle) took cover and forced our left wing to flee. Most of those who fled were Congolese, but some Cubans were alarmed by this and also withdrew. Thus, instead of completely eliminating the two trucks, at a certain point we were pursued and had to retreat. As always happened under such circumstances, this became a total rout. The Congolese rapidly crossed the Kimbi, and didn’t stop until they reached the General Staff headquarters, so we were left with mainly Cubans, although this time the Rwandans who had more experience of battle also remained. One of them even fired his bazooka at the truck, and another, who was part of our contingent, proudly displayed the boots he had taken from a dead soldier because his own were ruined. The Rwandans also helped to retrieve weapons.

This action showed how far we still were from organizing forces that could wage at least such minor battles, and the deficiency in the training of some of the Cubans, who became alarmed at conditions different from those they were used to in their army, such as the conditions of guerrilla warfare, and failed to act with initiative and in a coordinated manner.

On the enemy side, the soldiers defended themselves well, showing by their response to the destruction of the first vehicle that they were trained and making progress. They were all Africans, but our enemy was obviously far from being a push-over, contrary to what the Congolese claimed when they blamed all the problems on white mercenaries who they said had instilled terror in the Africans.

Before the clash began, Calixte's chief lieutenant told me his men refused to fight alongside the Rwandans because they ran off shooting all over the place and were capable of killing their own compañeros. We had no doubts about this, having had the same experience ourselves, but we had every reason to be more dubious about the Congolese as they never fired at the enemy and ran away at the first sound of gunfire. This didn't worry us much because the same thing had happened with the Rwandans at first, but now, in this third action—admittedly with a smaller number of men—they had shown a new mentality. Nevertheless, any attempt to unite the two groups seemed doomed to fail. We were able to avoid the first crisis and persuade Calixte's group to fight alongside Mundandi's, but then a dispute broke out over weapons. I insisted that they be given to the Congolese as a gesture of goodwill, but the Rwandans argued that they were their weapons and that the Congolese had done nothing to deserve them. There was an attempt to resolve things by force, but after talking to Captain Zakarias we were able to get the situation under control and the rifles were reluctantly handed over to the Congolese but without any show of friendship. Not wanting to remain any longer, the Rwandans immediately returned to their part of the front. This happened a day after I informed Massengo of my views about Zakarias and the need for unity in the struggle.

The result of this clash was satisfactory, insofar as we had suffered no casualties. In a reconnoiter some hours later with Mbili, Compañero Anzali set fire to the abandoned enemy truck and suffered some quite serious burns when the gasoline ignited.

For his part, Azi had ambushed some enemy soldiers at Nyangi and maybe wounded one or two, but the action was largely ineffective.

Nevertheless, I still hoped that things might work out. I gave instructions for new ambushes to be laid on the road, while I prepared to go to Lulimba to persuade Lambert of the need for action. Among the documents in the truck, mentioned before, we had found a payroll mentioning 53 men in Lulimba, and we thought this would be the ideal opportunity to attack there with Lambert's numerically superior forces, thereby opening the road to Kasengo. If the ambushes between Katenga and Lulimba were successful, we would have a few days' breathing space to draw a circle around Lulimba and to assemble all our scattered forces from that large region.

In accordance with our principles, we launched the beginnings of social programs. Dr. Hindi, who had arrived from the base, began seeing the local peasants and established a schedule of visits to the mountain villages. I distributed legume seeds brought from the lake, so that some vegetables could be sown and cultivated and later provided to us. We managed to create a different, more communicative atmosphere. Like peasants anywhere in the world, they were responsive to any human interest shown to them; they were grateful and very cooperative. It was painful to think that these same people who showed genuine trust in us and real interest in work could, when they joined the Liberation Army, become the undisciplined, battle-shy idlers we saw before us. Our military units, instead of being factors in the development of revolutionary consciousness, were a dumping ground in which everything became rotten as a result of the disorganization and lack of leadership we have already lamented so frequently in these notes.

THE PATIENT GROWS WORSE

At the end of August I made my usual analysis, more optimistic this time than any of the others I had written during my seven months in the Congo.

> My scholarship has run out, which signifies an advance. This month can be recorded as generally very positive, with a qualitative change in the men in addition to the action at Front de Force. The presence of Zakarias with 10 men is a good indication of this, as is the fact that nearly all the rest at the front are down on the plain. Now we need to come up with some results and to make the situation here more stable. My next steps will be to visit Lambert in Lulimba and to make a trip to Kabambare, then to convince them of the necessity of taking Lulimba and continuing on from there. But for all this to happen, this ambush and the following actions must produce results.
>
> I don't know what Kabila will do, but I will try to get Massengo to visit the fronts so as to change people's attitude toward him. Then the peasants must be organized throughout the zone and the front put under a single command. In two months, if everything works out well, we could have [Front de] Force encircled and then try to cut off its electricity so that it loses its strategic importance. Everything is looking much brighter—today, at least.

A few days later, however, dark shadows were reemerging. Aly had some serious altercations with the leaders in his area and was now at the Lake [Base], unwilling to return although he would not say so. In the recently abandoned area at Front de Force, activity had completely fallen off. We had sent someone to Kigoma to find a couple of oxyacetylene bags, with the idea of sabotaging the overhead power lines, but these were extremely difficult to transport because of the weight and the men's negative attitude;

in fact, they didn't want to carry out any action without the Cubans. The reconnoitering for a site from which to fire cannon at the intake pipes of the hydro-electric power station did not yield any positive results. And here, after the initial euphoria, the soldiers became tired of the active life and asked to return to the fun and games at their Upper Base.

The picture was most depressing with regard to the relations of Massengo and Kabila with the leaders in the Fizi area, and of the revolution in general with the Tanzanian government. Kabila and Massengo went to Kibamba, but we heard immediately that the Tanzanian authorities refused to deliver a quantity of weapons we had requested, including the necessary fuses for the anti-tank mines, and were demanding Kabila's immediate presence. We knew this to be the case because the person sent to get the weapons was Changa, our "admiral," and he had been told personally that nothing would be delivered and that Kabila himself should go and talk to the government. This was the only time Kabila had made a serious attempt to cross into the Congo (at least there was no proof to the contrary), and now he was obliged to return to discuss some problem or other.

At the Lake Base, some members of Fizi's rival group, who had been arguing for liquidation in the combat zone, were arrested. Massengo did not have a proper prison there and so he sent them to be held in Uvira. In fact, he decided to take them there himself and to use the trip to carry out an inspection of the affected zone. They left by launch. This is Aly's version of events; it gives a clear idea of the turn they now took.

> 8-9-65
>
> From Compañero: Aly
>
> To Compañero: Tatu
>
> Re: Compañero Tom's trip to Kazima
>
> *Compañero Massengo's trip to Changa and Aly's to Uvira*
>
> We left on the 16th at 21:00, intending to leave Compañero Tom at Kazima and to continue on to Uvira with the three counterrevolutionary prisoners, despositing some weapons there and inspecting the area, the latter to be conducted by Massengo.

We reached Kazima at 24:30. On arriving in Kazima, Compañero Massengo ordered the squad leader to come aboard, but a soldier climbed up, discovered that President Massengo was on board and started talking to him; he offered to bring him some cigars and various trifles on his way back.

When he got off, the soldier asked for some soap and said that, if it was not forthcoming, the boat would not be allowed to leave. Compañero Tom got off and told the squad not to shoot, which they ignored once Compañero Tom was 100 meters away.

Each of them fired a few shots and ran away; one was captured later.

Compañero Massengo called the soldiers and officers to the shore and ordered them to capture the rest of the squad, saying that he would pick them up on his way back.

We continued on toward Uvira, but on reaching Mubembe at 9:00 a.m. Compañero Massengo said we should stop there and then travel on at night.

We received rather a frosty reception in the village. Compañero Massengo talked with the chairman there and a student compañero from China, asking them to call together the local population for a meeting to inform them of the political situation.

The meeting began at approximately 12:30 and lasted until 17:00. At that time Compañero Ernesto came to tell us not to say anything but that they wanted the prisoners released, otherwise there would be bloodshed.

At 17:30 Compañero Massengo said we would leave and go down to the shore. Once we were there, Compañero Massengo told us to get on board the boat, and when we delayed briefly, Ernesto called out again, saying that we were stupid and that they were going to start shooting at the boat. They immediately began to take up positions and to speak in a threatening manner; a squad came to take the prisoners off the boat, and this was done without any response, until one of the sailors fired his rifle and made off after the rebels, with Massengo and a few others following behind. They began to give blasts on the whistle to gather the troop together and

succeeded in capturing 11 soldiers, but not the prisoners, whose insubordination seemed to have infected the soldiers.

The pressure exerted by these men and the reports received made it impossible to continue to Uvira, as things were worse farther on.

We know that those who freed the prisoners were from Fizi and Baraka, and some other men were mentioned whose names I no longer remember as I didn't want to take notes in front of them.

I want you to know that at no time did Massengo come to warn us of the danger in that place or that he was aware of the danger as it was common knowledge; but we were not aware of it because we didn't know the language well and it was all discussed at the meeting in which we did not take part—but he did.

As far as we could tell from Ernesto, this situation did not arise just now.

Bearing this in mind, I would like to know what is to be done; what should be our attitude now that things are passing from words to deeds, and dangerous deeds at that.

As far as you are concerned, you should be quite careful because they—that is, the rebels—are quite strong and are not well known to us.

On the way back we passed through Kazima and picked up the political commissar, but not those who were supposed to be prisoners, because they had not been recaptured.

Back at a hamlet, although we made the signals we had taught them the night before, they opened fire.

Awaiting a prompt reply, I remain yours with revolutionary greetings,

Aly

Fortunately, Aly's suspicions were unfounded as Massengo himself had to go on board the boat and was exposed to the same dangers.

Almost immediately, Massengo sent me a letter indicating how insecure the compañeros leading the Congolese revolution felt. It is dated Kibamba,

September 6.

To Comrade Dr. Tatu

Makungu

Comrade Doctor:

I greet you after a few days' separation. On military matters I have followed your advice: Comrade Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert will coordinate the activities of the Lulimba-Makungu and Kalonda-Kibuyu fronts.

Comrade Kabila and I were ready to visit you, but unfortunately the circumstances were such that we could not carry out this plan for the time being. Five days after we arrived in Kibamba, Compañero Kabila received an urgent call from President Nyerere of Tanzania. The political situation inside the country is not very serious, and we had hoped that with an effort on our part we could overcome some of the problems that irresponsible people have caused. Today we proceeded to arrest some members of the counterrevolutionary gang[1] and the people did not protest, indicating that their defects are recognized. The leader of this gang is the traitor Gbenyé, who, after having received several million, sent these agents everywhere with the aim of burying the revolution and then going off to negotiate with those in Leopoldville.

The imperialists promised Gbenyé that they would let him form a government if he succeeded in killing off the revolution and uniting all the agents of imperialism within his future government, with the aim of maintaining neocolonialism in the Congo.

Gbenyé used the meeting of East African heads of state (Tanzania, Uganda and Kenya) to state that we should resolve our problems with Leopoldville, and promised that after the reconciliation with Leopoldville we would establish a federation with the East African states. This is why Compañero Kabila has just been called to Dar es-Salaam; the intention may well be to put

pressure on us. They even refused to allow Compañero Kabila to be accompanied by one of our people to Dar es-Salaam.

Despite all this, we will never agree to such a reconciliation. We ask you to discuss this with your embassy.

I should also point out that I am leaving today for Uvira, along with the Cuban Captain Aly, and that when I return I will also go to Kibamba. I hope to find your reply on these matters by then, especially your good advice about the problem I've mentioned above.

We consider that the major African leaders don't want the complete liberation of the Congo, fearing that when the Congo wins total independence under the leadership of genuine revolutionaries the rest of Africa will be in danger of following its example.

Anyway the situation is not yet serious, and we are pretty sure we can get through this period.

On the basis of what I have just written, I hope that you will be able to give us some advice about how to resolve some of these problems.

The letter raised a number of interesting points: Gbenyé's activity and links with the imperialists, which have not been clearly demonstrated to the extent that Massengo suggested; his promises to African leaders, of which we also have no proof; and the pressure on Kabila from Dar es-Salaam, which certainly did exist. It is worth mentioning his approach to the Cubans at this point, which might have occurred in an earlier and more relaxed period, for now the enemy was about to unleash an offensive. I replied immediately along the following lines:

Dear Comrade,

I have just spoken with your envoy Comrade Charles Bemba; he will be able to tell you how I see the situation, but I will make a brief balance sheet.

My impression is that it has really been shown it is possible to remain on the plain. After the actions at Mundandi's front, we have just laid an ambush that resulted in seven or eight enemy soldiers

killed and six weapons captured.[2] We placed ambushes on two roads: the road from Nyangi to Lulimba, and the one from [Front de] Force to Lulimba.

I think we should apply more pressure in this area and try to drive out the Tshombists who are close to Lulimba, so that we have a road open to the lake. I am aware of the problems in Baraka and Fizi, but it is very important for us to have a direct supply route.

On the problems you outlined to me. First, you should rest assured that we will support you in relation to the Tanzanian government, and also—as far as we are able—in meeting your needs. I'd like to talk with you, but I understand your difficulties in leaving the General Staff headquarters. In a few more days, I will be free to go and speak with you. I would then like to visit other parts of the same front and ask you not to keep me at the Lake [Base]; my job is what I am doing now.

Like you, I am optimistic about the long term, but it is necessary to pay more attention to political and military organization. We have made some progress but not enough, and we will be able to advance more by fighting more. Combat is a great school for soldiers. Moreover, the enemy is our great source of weapons; if we cannot use the lake, we still have the battlefield.

I welcome your decision to appoint Comrade Lambert as coordinator, even though his role is becoming more difficult. In my view, his real responsibility should be as commander of the front. I would also draw your attention to the fact that the Rwandan comrades have fought very well with us and have now done the same with the Congolese comrades. Captain Zakarias is very brave, despite some flaws that can be corrected over time.

One point that needs to be stressed is the policy toward the peasants. Without the support of the population, we will not have any real successes. I hope to talk with you at greater length about this when we see each other.

With my revolutionary greetings,

Tatu

I maintained an optimistic tone, which continued for a while longer. In spite of our difficulties, we had inflicted some losses on the enemy and had the potential to wear them down and force them to retreat from certain positions as too costly to defend.

During these days, the long-awaited messengers arrived. They turned out to be Aragonés, Fernández Mell and Margolles,[3] who had come to stay at the front. When I learned who was coming, I feared that they might have a message urging me to return immediately to Cuba or to give up the struggle because it did not occur to me that the party's organization secretary would relinquish his job to come to the Congo, especially in a situation like this where nothing was clear and there were quite a few negatives. Aragonés insisted on coming and Fidel gave his consent; it was the same with Margolles; and Fernández Mell, an old comrade-in-arms, was the man I had requested to come from Cuba in order to strengthen the command structure. Karim also joined us; he would replace Tom as the political commissar given his greater ideological and educational development.

The first three entered the country clandestinely as doctors. We didn't know if they would really be able to stay because they were whites, but our position was such that we could do virtually whatever we wanted in our own camp; the problems began when we began to involve ourselves in the Congolese camp to organize things.

Because of his size, Compañero Aragonés was given the Swahili name "Tembo" (elephant), and Fernández Mell, because of his character, was called "Siki" (vinegar). Other names came from a vocabulary book. Tembo was given the number 120 on the list of members of our force. Taking into account our losses—four killed, two returned to Cuba, and Compañero Changa (who, though on the list, operated in Kigoma and organized the lake crossings)—we had 113 men or, not counting the four doctors, 107 combatants. The force was large enough to achieve something, but as we have seen, several circumstances that I could not or did not know how to avoid meant that these men were dispersed over a wide area, so that we could never count on more than 30 or 40 men at the time of any action. Furthermore, nearly everyone suffered at least one attack of malaria—and some much more than once—which meant that this force was not capable

of deciding the outcome of a campaign. It might have formed the nucleus of a new type of army if the conditions of the Congolese compañeros had been different.

The morale of our troop had improved somewhat, as evident in the fact that three of the compañeros who had planned to return to Cuba now asked to resume their full duties: Abdallah, Anzali and Bahati.

It appeared as though the Liberation Army was also getting reinforcements in the form of contingents trained in China and Bulgaria. These guys' first priority was to take 15 days' leave to visit their families here, and then extend this vacation when it proved to be too brief. Besides, they were cadres trained for the revolution so it would be irresponsible to risk their lives on the battlefield; they had come to infuse their compañeros with the mountain of knowledge they had acquired in six months of theoretical studies, but it would be a crime against the revolution to actually make them fight.

This was the attitude that permeated all the groups, regardless of whether they had been in China, Bulgaria or the Soviet Union. Such were the consequences of training students from the petty-bourgeois milieu in the Congo, all bearing a burden of resentment and an urge to imitate the colonialists.

Those chosen were French-speaking students, or sons of political bosses who had absorbed everything negative in European culture and none of the revolutionary spirit born with its proletariat. They returned with a superficial gloss of Marxism, full of their own importance as "cadres" and a great desire to command that was expressed in acts of indiscipline or even conspiracy.

The humble ordinary combatants, capable of giving their lives for a cause they barely understood, were disregarded by leaders who avoided the centers of the struggle and lacked revolutionary cadres to assist them. We were determined to reveal these cadres among the debris, but time finally ran out for us.

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1. **Che's note:** These were the three prisoners Aly mentioned.

2. **Che's note:** In fact seven weapons were captured, but a Rwandan took one, causing a dispute when it was discovered, and he was ordered to give it back.

3. Captain Aldo Margolles, then Cuban vice-minister of the interior.

TAKING THE PULSE

It was necessary to maintain the action on the Katenga-Lulimba road in order to prevent the arrival of reinforcements so that the number of isolated enemy troops would remain small enough for us to attack. We doubled the number of ambushes and placed Pombo and Nane at the front. We began to focus on a point that we broke through day after day but the enemy rapidly restored its position, until finally a strong garrison was placed there that prevented us from continuing.

After sending Azima and a small group ahead to reconnoiter, I left for Lulimba. It was a cloudy day, and intermittent rain slowed us down and forced us to seek shelter in some of the abandoned houses that were a frequent sight along the way. The road had also fallen into disrepair, even before the recent events had convulsed the region. In mid-morning, there were sounds of fighting and aircraft coming from the direction of the ambush; we learned what had happened several days later, when Moja reported that the guardsmen had broken our defenses at the cost of a few armored cars, and probably some casualties among their soldiers, and had been able to reinforce Lulimba. Enemy troops also advanced from Lulimba to help their comrades at the point where they had broken through, which made us think that there had never been only 53 soldiers there, as the captured payroll indicated, but many more. At a certain point we thought that Lulimba was the goal of the battle, but in fact they were reinforcing key points in order to launch an offensive. We guessed this later because of the major work going on at Front de Force and Nyangi, but we had no intelligence from the enemy camp.

At midday we met Azima on his return from the reconnoiter. He had gone along the road as far as a village we called Lulimba, without encountering any guardsmen. The road runs parallel to the positions occupied by the rebels in the mountains, up to the point where it joins the

highway from Front de Force and heads straight toward the hills, ascending at the lowest and most negotiable point.

Azima told us how he had scouted a kilometer beyond the junction, along the apparently more important road to the Kimbi River, but found no trace of human presence. They also explored the place known as the Mission, a former Protestant church that is now abandoned; as they crossed this no-man's-land, they were spotted by look-outs on the ridges six kilometers away who fired at them with 17 artillery rounds, a number of mortar shells and some other arms he could not specify. Their aim was accurate enough, but it would have been a titanic feat to score a parabolic hit on six men marching along a road; the result was an outrageous waste of projectiles, fired by chance in an area that should have had outposts all over the place.

With all this ahead of us, we decided to halt and get some sleep, for there was still a long way to go, and it was exhausting to attempt it in one day. We had to send someone ahead to tell the General Staff at Lubondja that we were coming by the road across the plain. The next day, we made contact with advance parties which, on our advice, had been sent to accompany us to the Lulimba barrier in the mountains.

As we traveled, we could see the large number of peasant settlements in the forest at the foot of the mountains, two, three or four kilometers from the main road, in places where there was some water. The peasants had built primitive houses, and those willing to run the risk of an encounter with the enemy provided for themselves from new or old fields close to the road as well as from a little game-hunting. We spoke for a long time with the peasants; as we had no medicines with us, I asked Makungu to send a doctor to attend to some sick people and I promised that a doctor would drop by every fortnight on scheduled rounds.

Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert's barrier was a cluster of little huts (complete with lice) built of straw or zinc by the side of the road, with no vegetation to conceal them, with no trenches or shelters of any kind, and with the scant protection of a couple of antiaircraft machine guns. When aircraft appeared, the soldiers defended themselves by running and hiding in a nearby gully. But although the position was very visible, there had not been any major air attacks. There were no fortifications at the first defensive line either, only a few bazookas and look-outs. (Trenches were

always a headache because, due to some superstition or other, the Congolese soldiers refused to go into holes they had dug in the ground and failed to construct any solid defenses against attack.) The strength of the position was the height from which it overlooked the road winding among the hills; this made it easy to attack troops coming up toward them, as long as they came only by road. If infantry were sent to advance at the edges, there would be no one to cut them off and they could take the position with virtually no casualties.

There were very few people at the barrier and no officers. We thought of marching straight on to Lubondja, but they sent word that a commander would come up to meet with us. When he arrived the next day, he told us that Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert was in Fizi because of a sick daughter; he had been at the Lake [Base] before that, and it was now a month and a half since he last set foot in the camp. The man in charge of the troop spent his time in Lubondja, which was classified as the General Staff, and only a lower-ranking officer remained at the barrier (which made no difference because no one had any authority over the men). Food was provided by the peasants, who had to walk some 15 kilometers to the camp from the area around Lubondja and occasionally they did some hunting nearby where there is plenty of game.

When the food arrived (basically cassava root), they began the work of grinding it individually to make *bukali*, as there was no tradition of communal meals. Each person had to prepare his own portion with what he had managed to obtain, so that the camp became a huge multi-kitchen where even the look-outs participated in the general disorder.

They asked me to address the troop, a group of less than 100 who were not all armed, and I fired off my usual “volley.” Armed men, I said, are not soldiers but simply armed men; a revolutionary soldier is formed in combat, and there was no sign of combat around there. I asked them to come down from the hills, so that Cubans and Congolese shared the same conditions as we had come to endure the hardships of the struggle together. The war would be hard and peace would not come soon; victory could not be expected without great sacrifices. I also explained that *dawa* is not always effective against modern weapons, and that death would be common in battle. All this was said in my elementary French, which Charles Bemba then translated into Kibembe, the native dialect in that region.

The commander was willing to come down with his troop, but would not attack unless he received orders from his superiors. We would achieve nothing by bringing this motley little group down to the plain if there was no order to attack Lulimba. I decided to go to Fizi and try to convince Lambert. We went first to Lubondja on the great Fizi plain, some 15 kilometers along the main road from the outpost. The peasants gave us a fine reception, which took material shape in food. The whole atmosphere was one of peace and security, as it had been a long time since the guardsmen last made a raid into the mountains, and the whole group enjoyed the relative well-being characterized by a variety of foods such as potatoes and onions and a more stable life. We left the next day and had traveled 10 kilometers when a truck carrying troops to Lubondja appeared and, on its way back, took us to Fizi. Inside the vehicle was an individual with all the signs of alcohol poisoning, including dreadful vomiting. I found out the next day that he had died in Fizi's hospital—or receptacle would be a better word, because it had no doctors or medical assistance of any kind.

During the 40 or more kilometers on the road, we were able to observe a number of features of the region: first, the large number of armed men wandering about all the villages we passed, each with an officer who spent his time either in his own or in a friendly house, clean, well fed and well supplied with drink; second, the fact that the soldiers appeared to have a lot of freedom and to be quite happy with the situation, always walking around with a rifle on their shoulder; and third, the great distance between Lambert's men and Moulana's, who regarded each other like cats and dogs. They immediately recognized Charles, Massengo's inspector, and the atmosphere froze.

Fizi is a small town, but still the largest I saw in the Congo. It has two clearly defined sectors: a small one with masonry houses, some very modern; and an African quarter with the usual huts, impoverished and lacking water and hygienic facilities, the latter being the more populous of the two, and had a lot of refugees from other regions; the big shots and army personnel lived in the other, smaller sector.

Fizi is situated at the top of the elevation that rises from the lake, 37 kilometers from Baraka in a prairie that has little vegetation. Its only defense was a single antiaircraft machine gun, operated by a Greek mercenary who had been taken prisoner in fighting around Lulimba; but

they were quite satisfied with such a precarious defense. General Moulana gave me a very cool reception as he knew the purpose of my visit and, given the tension between Lambert and himself, he thought it opportune to make his disgust obvious. I was in a strange situation: housed by General Moulana, a polite but frosty host, and courted by an exuberant and extremely friendly Lambert, I was an undeclared battlefield. As a result, we were given two meals: one by the general, one by Lambert. They treated each other with respect, and Lambert would come to attention masterfully in front of the general.

In a brief meeting I informed the major-general [sic] of the work we had accomplished at the front, and of my intention to discuss with Lambert whether he could do anything in the Lulimba area without making too much of a commitment. The general listened to me in silence, and then gave orders in Swahili to his adjutant (he did not speak French), whereupon the latter began to describe the major battles at Mwenga, a town about 200 kilometers to the north that they had just captured. The booty was a flag and a shotgun, which they had taken from a Belgian priest. Apparently, they had been unable to advance any further and capture other villages because of a shortage of weapons and ammunition. They had taken two prisoners, but (to quote their own words): “You know, discipline is not very good and they were killed before reaching here.” The patriotic forces had lost three men. Now they wanted to reinforce Mwenga with heavy weapons and had sent someone to ask for them at the Lake [Base], along with more ammunition. Then they would begin a push toward Bukavu, through an area where they had some 300 weapons at their disposal. I didn’t want to ask too many questions because irony and distrust was visible on his face. I therefore let him talk, although it did not seem very logical that 300 men, having taken the position after a raging battle, should have won no other trophies than a flag and the village priest’s shotgun.

That night the general’s adviser, along with a colonel from the Kasengo area, explained to me the special features of their vast territority. They referred to Uvira as a sector in their zone, although its commander, Colonel Bidalila, did not take orders directly from them; the colonel from Kasengo, on the other hand, was a loyal subordinate of the general’s. Both complained that there were not enough weapons; the man from Kasengo had been waiting some time for equipment to arrive. I asked him why he

had not made a trip to Kibamba, and he replied that he could expect the requested material to reach Baraka, from where he and his men would take it to Kasengo and begin the offensive.

Both General Moulana and the colonel from Kasengo were veterans who had begun the struggle alongside Patrice Lumumba; they did not say so explicitly, but the “adviser” took it upon himself to explain that they had actually initiated the struggle and were genuine revolutionaries, whereas Massengo and Kabila had joined later and now wanted to capitalize on everything. He made a direct attack on these compañeros, accusing them of sabotaging his actions. In his view, as Kabila and Massengo were from northern Katanga, they were sending arms and provisions there and keeping this area, which was loyal to Soumialot, completely starved of supplies; the same was happening in Kasengo. Moreover, he had no respect for the command hierarchy. There was a general here, and yet Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert—the brigade commander—was completely independent and settled matters directly with Kabila and Massengo, obtaining weapons and ammunition that they did not receive and thereby undermining discipline and hindering the advance of the revolution.

The people from Kasengo and from Fizi both asked me for Cubans.

I explained that I was trying to concentrate my scant forces and did not want to scatter them across the extensive front and that one or two Cubans would not change the situation. I asked them to go to the Lake [Base], where our compañeros could instruct them in the handling of machine guns, artillery and mortars, so that their own people would be able to use these weapons instead of having to rely on a mercenary, as they were doing in Fizi. They were not convinced in the slightest by this argument.

The general invited me to go to Baraka and to his own village, Mbolo. I accepted diplomatically, but said that we would have to return the same day as we were due to go back to the Lulimba area. Before we left, they took me around Fizi and I had an opportunity to examine a wounded man from Kasengo. The bullet had gone through muscle, and the untreated wound had become infected and was emitting a nauseating smell (he had spent a fortnight like this). I recommended that he should be sent without delay to Kibamba for treatment by the doctors there, and suggested we could take advantage of our own trip to take him right away as far as Baraka. They considered it was more important to put a large escort on the truck and to

leave the wounded man in Fizi; I heard no more about him, but I imagine he didn't do so well.

What was important was to put on a *show.* General Moulana put on his combat gear, consisting of a motorcycle helmet with a leopard skin on top, making him look pretty ridiculous and causing Tumaini to call him "the cosmonaut." Walking very slowly and stopping every few paces, we eventually reached Baraka, a small town on the shores of the lake, where we again saw the disorganization which I have described frequently before.

Baraka displayed evidence of a former relative prosperity, including a cotton-baling factory, but everyone had been ruined by the war and the little factory had been bombed. Mbolo lies on the lake some 30 kilometers to the north, accessible by a very bad road that runs parallel to the shore. Nearly every thousand meters we came across what they called a "barrier," a stop signal as solid as the couple of poles and nondescript string from which it had been improvised, where travelers were required to show their documents. The shortage of gasoline meant that the only people traveling were functionaries of one kind or another, so that the effect of these groups was to disperse their forces instead of concentrating them. At Mbolo there was a change of personnel, the soldiers in the escort truck replacing three who were due to go to Fizi on leave; they organized a military parade that culminated in a speech by General Moulana. There the ridiculous achieved Chaplinesque dimensions; I felt I was watching a bad comedy, bored and hungry, while the officers uttered shouts, stamped on the ground and did imposing about-turns, and the poor soldiers came and went, vanished and reappeared, in the performance of their maneuvers. The man in charge of the detachment was a former non-commissioned officer in the Belgian army. Any soldier who fell into the hands of one of these NCOs had to learn the whole complicated liturgy of barracks discipline, with all its local nuances, which was all very well for organizing a parade whenever a fly moved in the area, but never got beyond that. The worst of it was that the soldiers were more receptive to all this nonsense than to lessons in tactics.

Eventually, they all left in different directions, while the general, in a friendly manner, took us to his home to recover from the day's exertions. That night we returned to Fizi and told Lambert that we wanted to leave immediately. Apart from the general hostility, the frostiness that dominated our relations, so different from the general attitude of the Congolese toward

us, there were so many signs of disorder and decay that it was obviously necessary to take serious measures to change things. I said as much to Lambert when I saw him and he modestly replied that General Moulana was like that but, as I had seen, such things did not happen in his sector.

We departed the next day in a jeep, but we soon ran out of gasoline and were left on the road to continue on foot.

In the afternoon we stopped to rest at the house of one of Lambert's friends who sold *pombe.* The colonel said he was going to see if any hunting was possible around there and it wasn't long before some quarry materialized—a piece of meat that we ate with our usual appetite—but Lambert himself turned up much later, showing signs that he had had plenty of *pombe* although he kept his wits about him (his voice certainly had a pleasant quality). We ran into a group of 15 or 20 of Lambert's recruits, who had decided to leave because they had not been given any weapons. He gave them a good tongue lashing, speaking with exaggerated emphasis because his state of euphoria had made him verbose, and they gathered up our equipment and accompanied us to Lubondja. I thought they were going to return to the front, but in fact they were simply enlisted as porters and then allowed to go free.

Later we discussed future plans with Lambert. He proposed leaving the General Staff in Lubondja, but I argued that it was nearly 25 kilometers from the enemy. A force easily numbering 350 men could not have its General Staff so far away; the impedimenta could be left here, but we ourselves had to be with our combatants at the front. He accepted this rather grudgingly, and we agreed to leave the next day. He took us to see his arsenal, at a well-concealed spot some five kilometers from Lubondja. It was quite considerable given the conditions of the Congo at the time: a large quantity of weapons and ammunition, including some they had captured in the past when the enemy had been weaker; a 60 mm. mortar with its shells, US-type Belgian bazookas, also with some shells, and 50-caliber machine guns. It was much better supplied than the weapons store at Fizi, giving some weight to what the other people had been arguing.

Our plan was to go straight down to the plain to meet Lambert's troops, those at Kalonda-Kibuyu and Calixte's troops, leaving only a few ambushes to intercept reinforcements. We would mount an elastic encirclement of Lulimba and use the men from Kalonda-Kibuyu for the dual purpose of

attacking on the road and preventing the arrival of reinforcements; in reserve we would have the men from the barrier on the Lulimba-Kabambare road who were also under Lambert's command.

We set out with all these good intentions, but we had not left the village of Lubondja (after the respective assemblies and the *dawa* ceremonies) when two T-28s and two B-26s appeared and started strafing the village systematically. After 45 minutes, two people had been slightly wounded, six houses destroyed and some vehicles hit by shrapnel. A commander explained to me that this demonstrated the strength of *dawa*: only two slightly wounded. I thought it best in this case not to start a discussion about the relative efficacy of aircraft and *dawa*, and so we left it at that.

The prevarication began when we reached the barrier, until finally Lambert explained to me that for various reasons it was not possible to go down: he had only 67 rifles and his 350 men had scattered among the various groups of dwellings in the nearby area; he did not have the forces to carry out a proper attack; he would immediately go and search for those on vacation and impose the necessary discipline, etc.

I persuaded him to send a group of men down to reconnoiter the plain and to continue with our advance; I would go with them. The next morning he left with the first group of men, telling me that he would accompany them a short distance and then go on to the Kabambare barrier to get more people; we would meet again down below.

When we reached the village we thought was Lulimba, nobody was there. We pushed on toward the Kimbi River and met everyone lying in ambush a couple of kilometers farther on; we discovered that the village we had been calling Lulimba was not Lulimba and that the real one was some four kilometers away, on the banks of the Kimbi. Lambert had received some news from Kalonda-Kibuyu, bragging that all the enemy positions had been destroyed and the guardsmen driven into the forest. Believing this to be true, he issued the order to calmly advance, but on reaching there, they almost ran into the guardsmen, who were just as relaxed as our own group. They were doing exercises in a camp near the village, and there were a lot of them. A little ambush was set up, and some scouts were sent off and estimated their strength at between 150 and 300.

The key task was to concentrate the greatest possible number of combatants, organize them and then launch a modest attack that would

attract enemy forces to that point. But first we had to establish a somewhat stronger base and wait for Lambert to bring his famous 350 men. We withdrew to the Mission, four kilometers from Lulimba, and awaited the outcome of the meetings with each of the barrier leaders; Lambert would be in charge of this.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The Mission camp gave the impression of being a group of kids on a weekend excursion, without a care in the world. From a distance, people could be heard arguing in loud voices, and the racket surrounding some funny incident was enough to bring down the roof of the church in which they were staying. It was a constant struggle to keep the sentries at their posts. Lambert came and went all the time, giving the impression of great efficiency in the search for his men, but these never showed up and we were never able to increase the total beyond 40. When he did manage to gather together a few more, others would return to their barrier or their little villages out in the sticks. Nor was it possible to bring machine guns down to strengthen the position; they barely made it to the first hill overlooking the access to the mountains.

The reconnaissance I had entrusted to Waziri and Banhir showed that there were many more soldiers than the 53 we had initially been told about. Their main camp was on the other side of the Kimbi River, but they also had another that we had not managed to locate accurately. The enemy crossed freely to this side of the river and ate from the large cassava fields once sown by the peasants on each side of the road. It would be relatively easy to ambush them there. Banhir, who had reconnoitered to the right of the road, thought there must be another camp, but he had not been able to see it before he was almost captured by the soldiers. I sent him off again to some small but commanding hills, where he could scour the plain for a second camp. He was unable to complete this mission, however, because he stumbled across some enemy soldiers out hunting—although fortunately they did not spot him. Such was their impunity that they would venture to the very foothills of the mountains. From where we were, we could hear them shooting in all directions. This made our sentries very nervous; on the

very first day, they had fled from the ambush at the sound of hunters shooting nearby.

We received news of Mbili's various engagements at the ambushes between Katenga and Lulimba; they had caused some enemy casualties but not as many as we would have liked, and reinforcement columns had been able to get through. Moja pointed out that our own men were the only ones left at the ambushes as the Congolese stayed at best for two or three days and it was more and more difficult to replace them; they were returning to their camp higher up, having completely lost the little enthusiasm with which they had started out. Airplanes had bombed the peasant villages of Nganja and Kanyanja, dropping leaflets with a blurry picture of some dead people and a caption explaining that this was the result of raids by *simbas.* Below this, an appeal in Swahili and French urged people not to let themselves suffer or be killed to enrich the Chinese and Cubans, who were here only to steal gold. Along with these stupidities were true statements such as the fact that the peasants had no salt or clothing, could not hunt or sow, and were threatened with starvation—things felt most acutely by the peasants. At the bottom of the leaflets was a safe-conduct pass signed by Mobutu, which would enable them to return to a normal life; Tshombe's army would guarantee their life and liberty.

This same method was used by Batista during our [revolutionary] war. Some weak individuals might have fallen for this, but this did very little damage in Cuba. My fear was that here the weak were the majority in every sense. Of course, the people who dropped the leaflets were as stupid as Batista's men—spreading the propaganda immediately after bombing and sowing terror. This seems to be the standard practice of repressive armies.

I went exploring the nearby area for places where weapons could be installed and effective ambushes laid. I spent the morning doing this and planned to continue when Danhusi, one of my aides, came running to tell me that the guardsmen had been hunting very close to the Mission and had fired a few shots; the sentries fled and soon everyone was dispersed. I had to make my way back and start the irksome business of searching for the men. This was difficult because their cohesion lasted only until an alert was raised, when they would all race to the safe shelter of the mountains. This disorderly flight meant that I was left with scarcely 20 or 25 Congolese.

The following day Lambert returned from his trip to the barrier on the Kabambare road and said that the men were now four kilometers from Lulimba. He had instructed them to be ready for any eventuality; there were now only 60 of them, not 120, although they were in good fighting spirits. I no longer had much faith in Lambert because of his frequent irresponsible acts, but we could count on 60 men as a first approximation. I gave him an account of what had happened and said that we could not attack with the men. The latest reports were that Lulimba had been significantly reinforced, and so I proposed that we organize three small ambushes to irritate the enemy: two where the cassava grew (and the enemy was off his guard), and another one on the main road. I would move my command post to the Kiliwe, a stream to the left of the barrier, and try to organize my men there. In reality, I was looking for a way to detach myself from Lambert and organize the mixed force, an ambition I had never been able to achieve because I had never had the necessary core group of Congolese. Lambert said that he would discuss this new tactic with his men and let me know, but his reply never came because of the sort of person he was, and also because events overtook us.

On one of his anarchic excursions from one side to the other, Lambert came across an enemy soldier out hunting and killed him. This caused me more anxiety as the Tshombists would certainly have heard the burst of automatic rifle fire and known that their soldier was armed with only a Springfield; furthermore, he had not been buried or taken away from the spot where he was killed. I pointed out to Lambert that the body should be buried so to hide any evidence and to keep the enemy uncertain about his fate, but this was too difficult because everyone was too terrified of the dead to do anything. I had to struggle hard to convince them that the corpse had to disappear; I don’t know if this happened, but at dusk they reported that it had been buried in a concealed place.

It was unwise to spend more time there because the sentries fled at the least hint of danger and sometimes didn’t even bother to report anything before heading off to the mountains. I proposed pulling back a kilometer, but although Lambert agreed in principle he did not act on this.

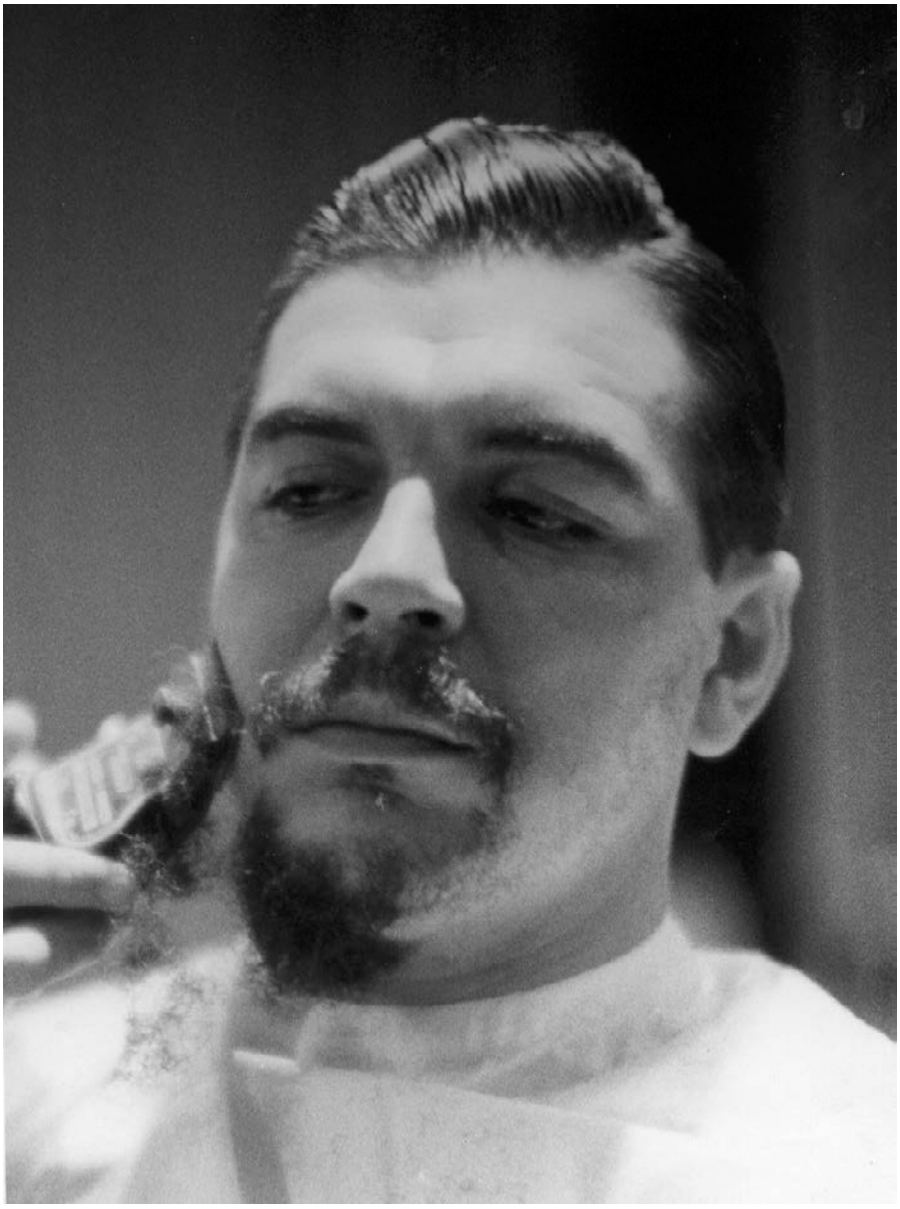
I should have gone to Makungu to look for the men I would command and form into the nucleus of a guerrilla army, free from the harmful influence of these undisciplined soldiers. But I could not leave Lambert

alone with his crazy retinue and we agreed that I would send him Moja with 10 men; in exchange he would give me 10 selected volunteers to undergo training. Lambert kept only half his promise: he sent 10 men, but they were not volunteers and certainly not selected; in fact, they were good for nothing.

At the stream, five kilometers from Lulimba, I caught up with the group that was coming led by Tembo; he had endured the fatiguing march with great dignity and won the respect of the skeptical Cubans. We now numbered 35, including the men assigned to go with Moja to help Lambert —a minuscule troop. The rest of our contingent of 120 men was scattered at the Lake [Base], at the Upper Base, at Front de Force and at Calixte's front. Each time we made progress there were fewer of us and it was proving impossible to concentrate our forces. I didn't dare leave any position completely without Cubans, as I knew there would immediately be a retrogression. There were some new faces in this group: a lieutenant, (Azima's brother, whom we called Rebokate); a Haitian doctor (Kasulu), who was very useful to us (without any disrespect, I should say he was more useful for his command of French than for his medical knowledge); and Tuma, the head of the wireless communications group. I discussed Tuma's instructions with him (which were to remain in Dar es-Salaam) and modified them so that he could establish his base on the higher part of the lake and try to make contact with Dar es-Salaam and Kigoma from there; I also instructed him to look for a powerful radio capable of communicating directly with Cuba by Morse Code. The war could not be conducted from the Congo (which is what I intended) if we had to depend on Dar es-Salaam for everything.

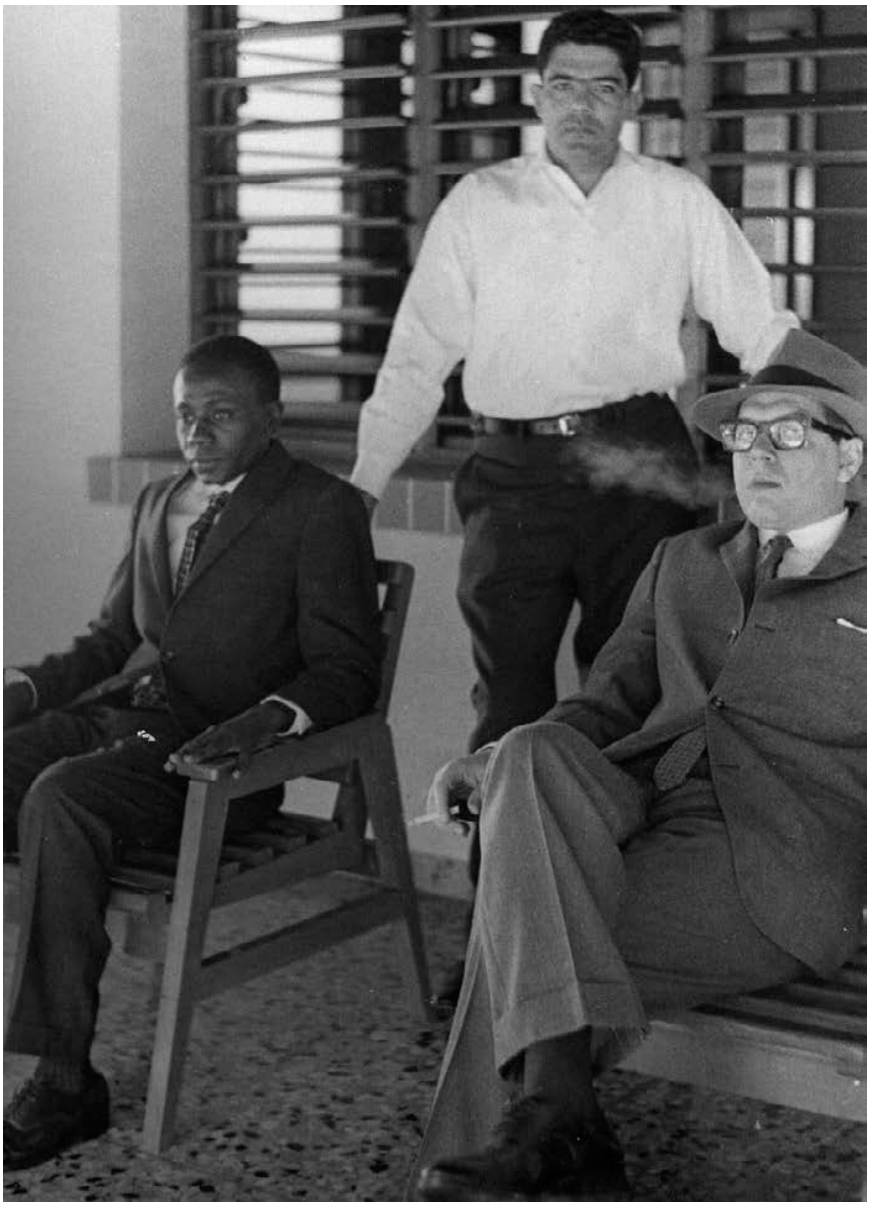
We agreed on the equipment required and on the use of a very good Chinese set, which had been distributed with absurd egalitarianism, one to each of the fronts, with no consideration of the fact that they didn't have the slightest idea of how to use it or that, even if they had, the limited range of the transmitter meant they could not communicate with each other. Nevertheless, it was impossible to take the equipment away from them; each was kept under guard and there was no way they could be convinced to part with it. We would try to form a strong communications unit to train Congolese operators. I also instructed him to examine the long-wave

apparatus in Fizi, which was still intact despite a number of air raids, and to see if we could not establish a revolutionary radio station for the region.[1]

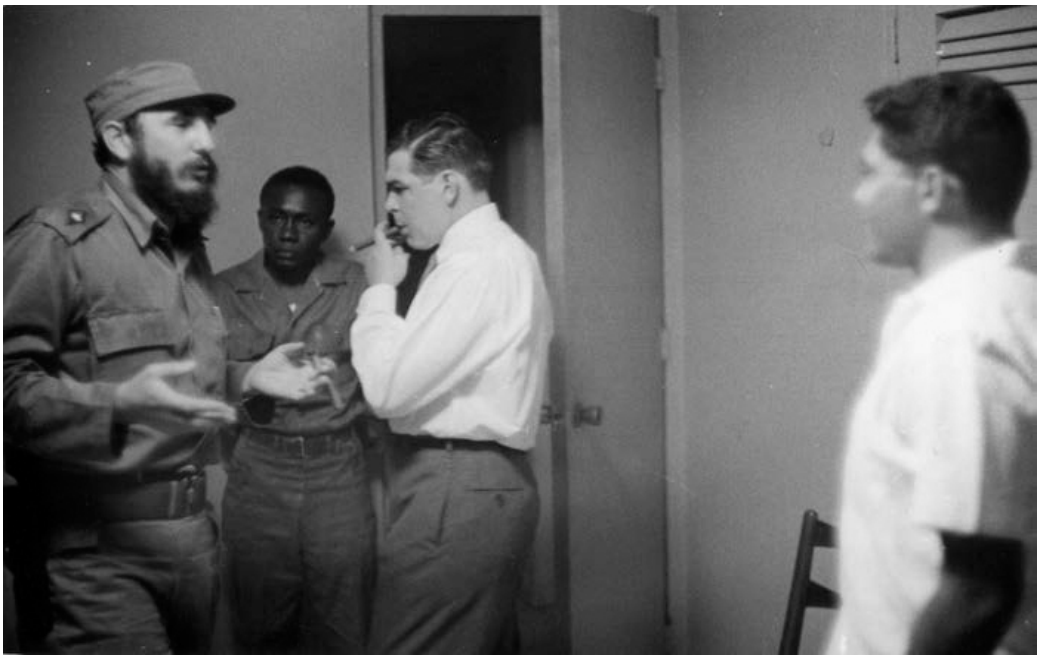


Che (Tatu) shaving his beard as part of the process of preparing his disguise.

Che assumed the identity of Ramón Benítez for his travel from Cuba to the Congo.

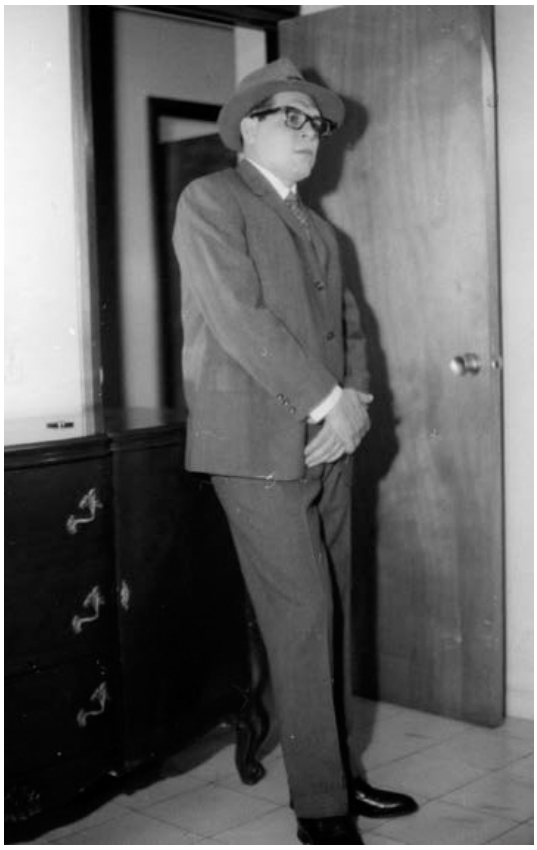


Seated left to right: Víctor Dreke (Moja) and Che (Tatu). Standing: José María Martínez Tamayo (Mbili).

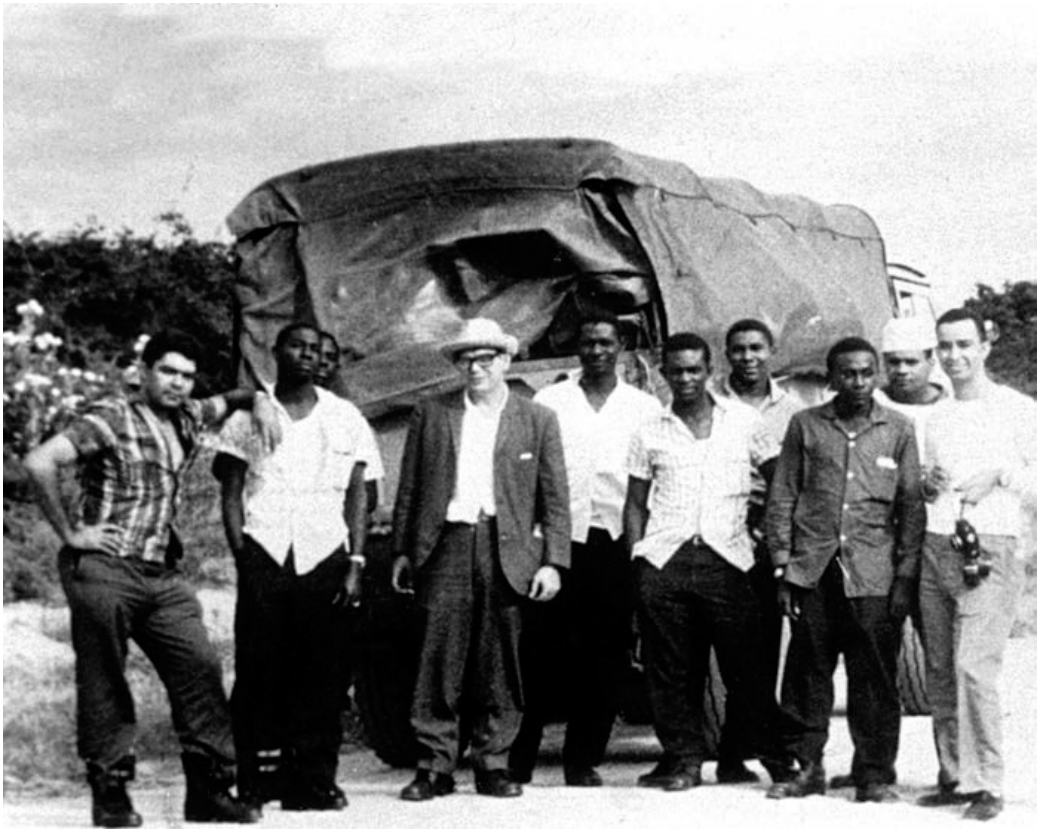


Fidel at the farewell for Che, Víctor Dreke and José María Martínez Tamayo before they left Cuba for the Congo.

Che (in disguise) with Fidel.



Che (in disguise) in Cuba, preparing to leave for the Congo.



The first group en route from Dar es-Salaam to Kigoma in Tanzania.

Soon after arriving at the camp. From left to right: Víctor Dreke (Moja), Rafael Zerquera (Kumi) and Che (Tatu).

Left to right: Ernest Ilunga (the Congolese translator), Rogelio Oliva (an official with the Cuban embassy in Tanzania) and the Congolese Kiwi. The others are unidentified.

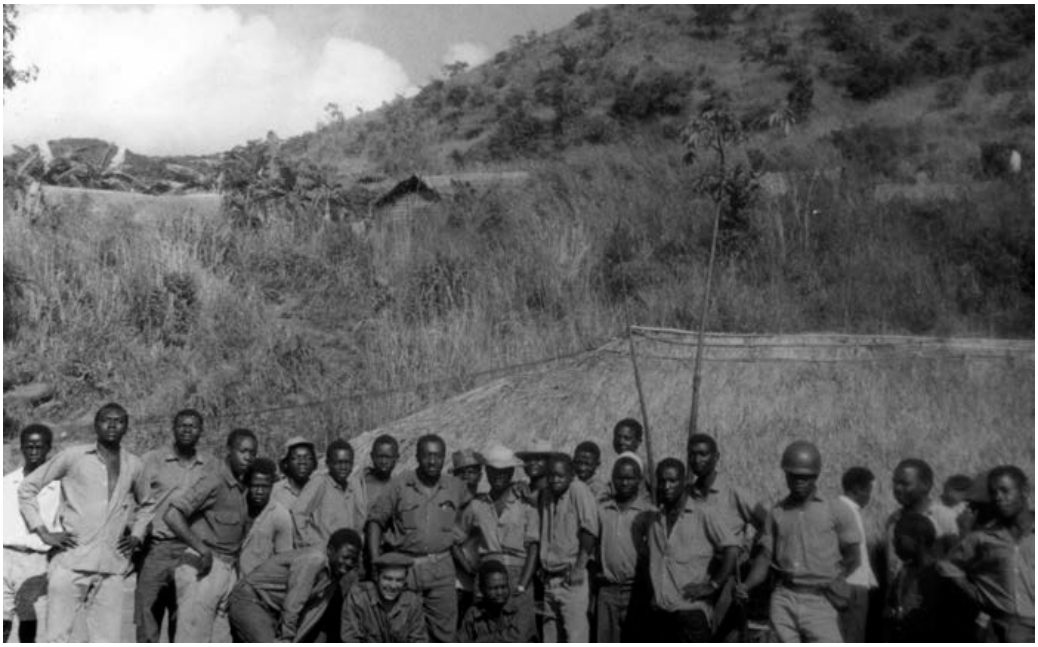
Cuban soldiers at the base. From left to right: Pablo B. Ortiz (Saba), Eduardo Torres (Nane) and an unidentified Congolese.

A group of Congolese and Cuban combatants. Second on the left: Godefroid Tchamlesso, Mario Armas Fonseca (Rebokate), Roberto Sánchez Barthelemí (Changa), Osmany Cienfuegos and Ramón Armas Fonseca (Azima), together with other combatants.

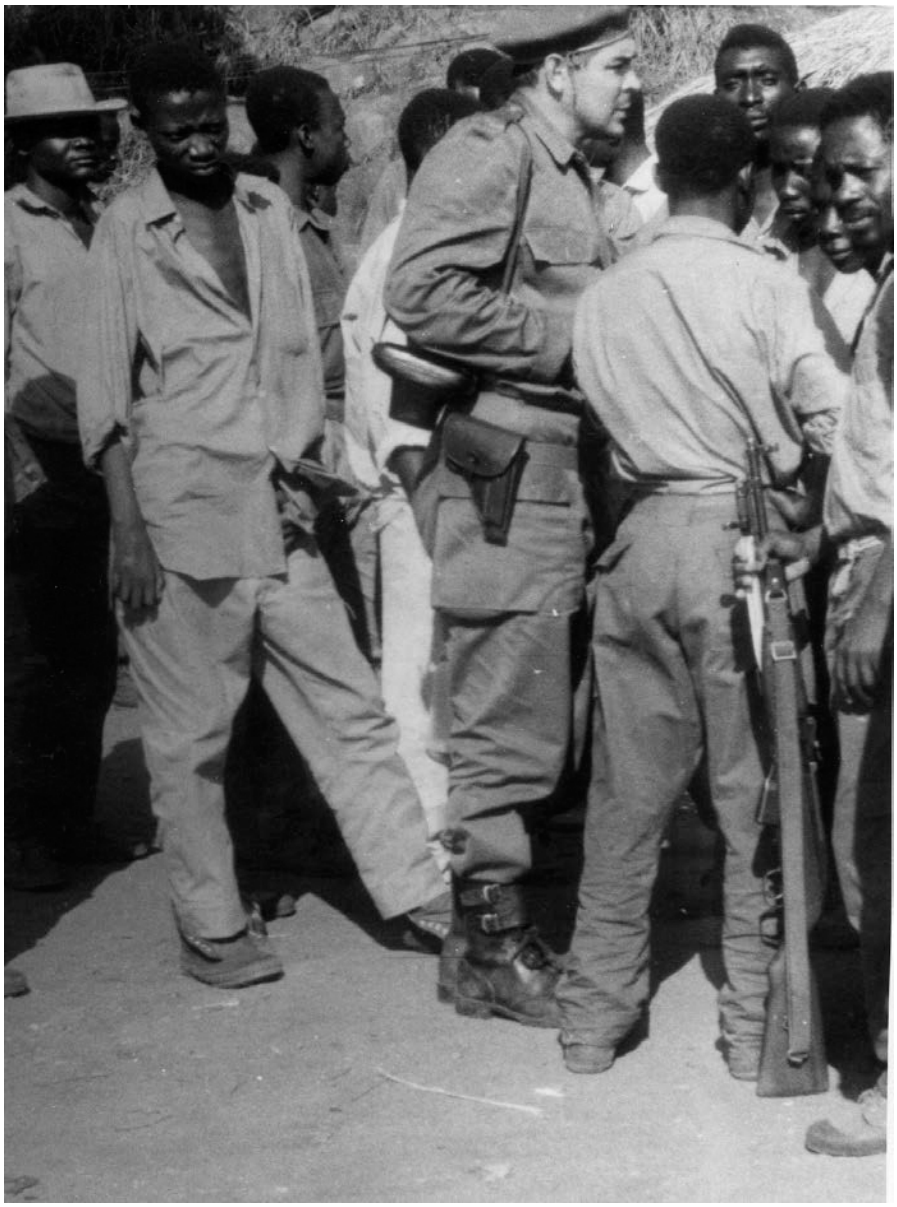
A group of Congolese and Cuban combatants. From second on the left: Godefroid Tchamlesso, Mario Armas Fonseca (Rebokate), Roberto Sánchez Barthelemi (Changa), Osmany Cienfuegos and Ramón Armas Fonseca (Azima), together with other combatants.

At the main camp. From left to right: Roberto Sánchez (Changa), Víctor Dreke (Moja), Kiwe, Osmany Cienfuegos, an unidentified Congolese and Rafael Zerquera (Kumi, the doctor).

In the middle: Víctor Dreke (Moja); on the right: Ángel Hernández Angulo (Sitaini) together with other combatants.



Seated in the middle, Che and Ernest Ilunga (translator and Swahili teacher). Standing: Rafael Zerquera (Kumi) together with other Cuban and Congolese combatants.



Che with a group of Cuban and Congolese combatants.

From left to right: Julián Morejón Gilbert (Tisa), Rogelio Oliva and Godefroid Tchamlesso.

At the Upper Base.

Cuban combatants constructing the camp at the Upper Base.

During a training exercise. From left to right: Santiago Terry Rodríguez (Aly), Godefroid Tchamlesso, Rogelio Oliva and Julián Morejón Gilbert (Tisa).

At the Upper Base. Second from the left with his back to the camera: Oscar Fernández Mell (Siki); crouching: José Ramón Machado Ventura; front: Ulises Estrada; reclining: Emilio Aragonés (Tembo) and Che; standing: Carlos Coello (Tumaini).

During a communications session. Seated, from left to right: Rogelio Oliva, José María Martínez Tamayo (Mbili) and Che.

Che giving military classes using a map of the zone of operations. To his left: Santiago Terry Rodríguez (Aly) and to his right: Ángel Hernández Angulo (Sitaini).

A class on tactics.

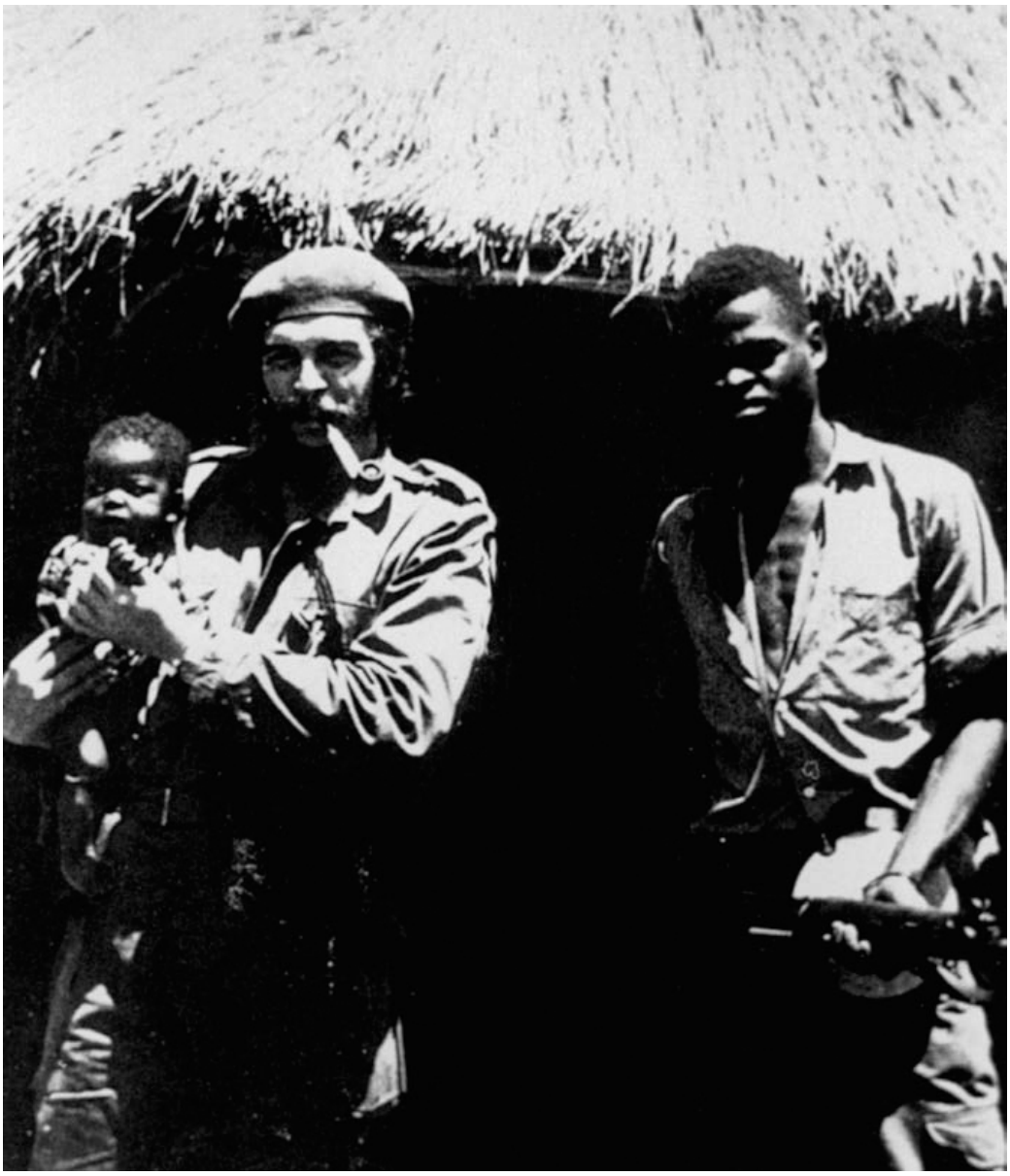
In the center: Ángel Hernández Angulo (Sitainí) preparing food with other combatants.

Che at mealtime.

Che with a group of local Congolese. Crouching: Roberto Chaveco Núñez (Kasambala).

At the Upper Base. From left to right: Godefroid Tchamlesso, Sammy Kent, Che and Kiwe.

Che during a break and enjoying what he called one of his “fundamental weaknesses”—smoking.

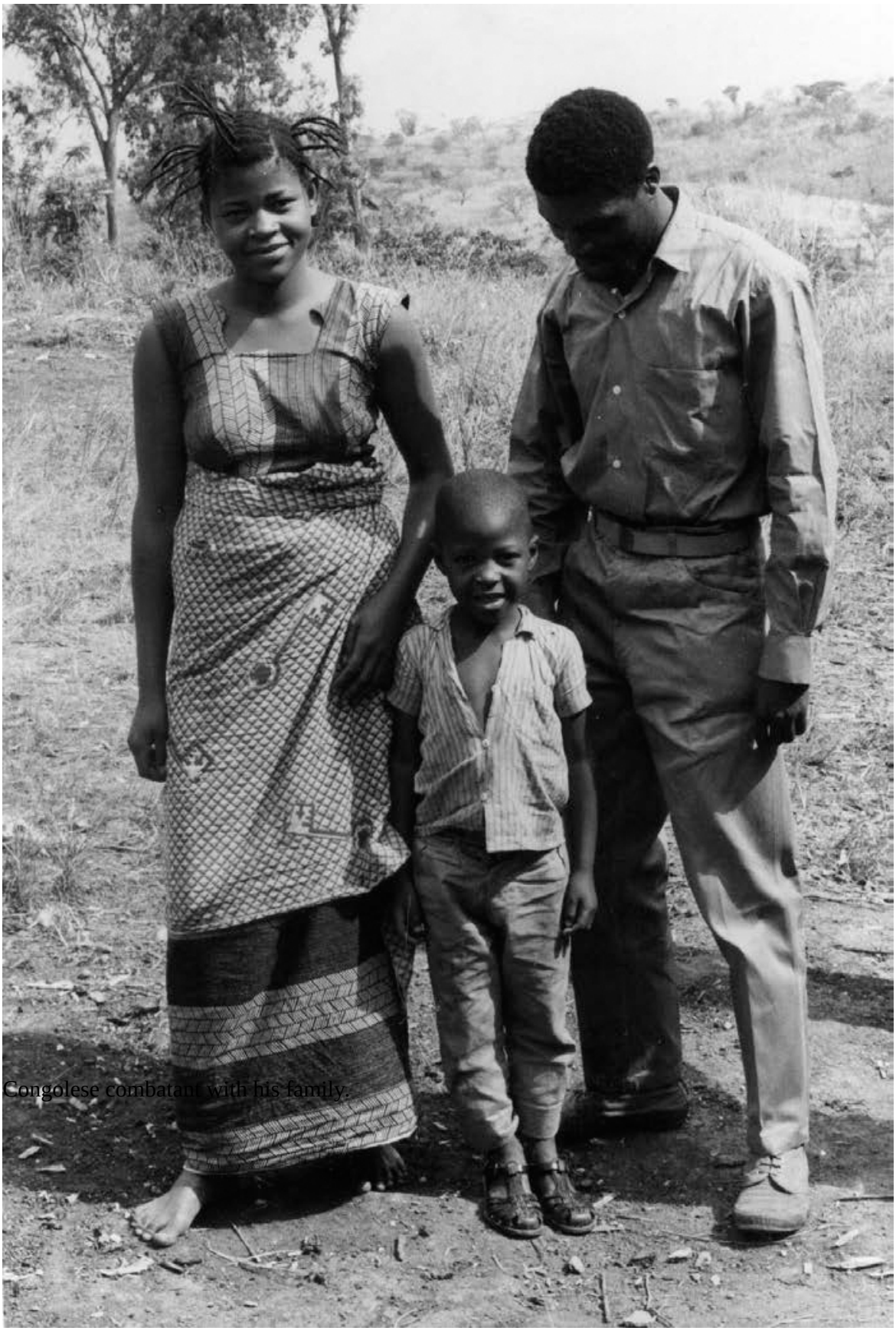


Che holding a Congolese baby.

Ch[illegible] the Cuban pre[illegible]

A Congolese child with a bullet wound. In the background is a group of combatants.

Residents of the zone of guerrilla operations. Photograph taken by Che.

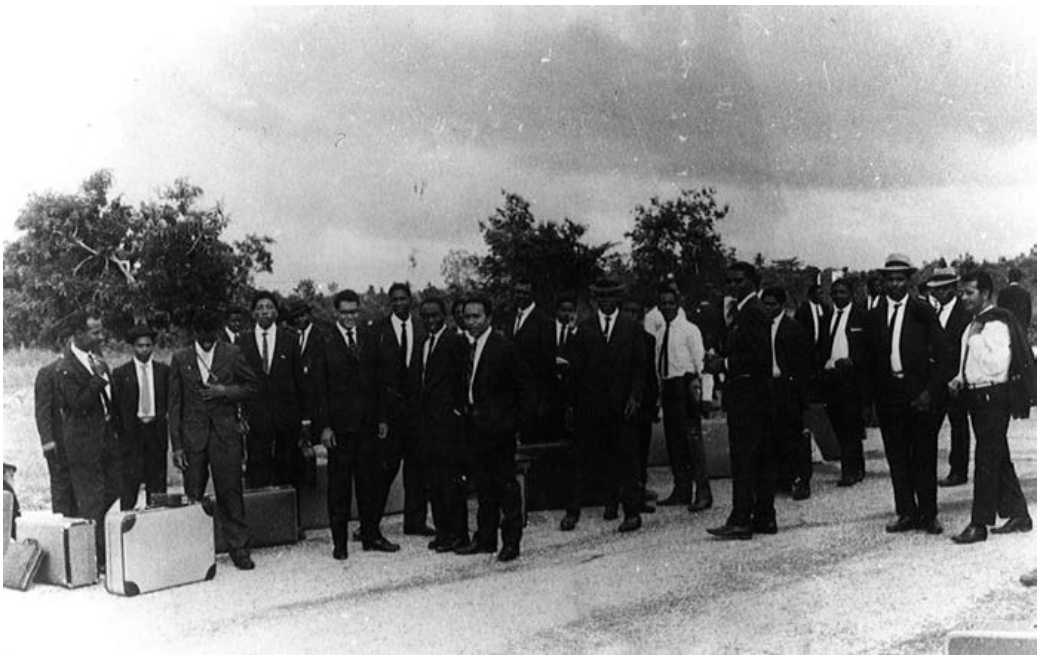


A Congolese combatant with his family.

One of the boats crossing Lake Tanganyika during the Cuban combatants' return to Tanzania.

Ch

Che, returning to Kigoma, again changes his appearance by shaving.



Cuban combatants at the Dar es-Salaam airport before returning to Cuba.

I sent a letter to Massengo with the compañeros full of the usual advice; this time I stressed that we had to discuss things seriously with the people in Fizi so as to clarify our relationship with them, and to use the existing radio, under a central control to avoid self-serving propaganda. I made a few criticisms in passing of the newspaper edited by Kiwe. Without referring to its generally poor quality—nothing much could be expected of it—I objected to the lies told about battles. They were terrible; any fabricator of reports from the Batista era could have learned a thing or two from Compañero Kiwe's feverish imagination.[2] He later blamed it all on his correspondents.

These days were used to try to determine the enemy's exact position, and to find a temporary camp that would allow us to begin the reorganization of our force and leave the roadside huts that gave us shelter for a while. Aircraft were active in the area, but they took no notice of the abandoned houses and instead machine-gunned the area around Lambert's barrier. We had become anxious as a result of this attack, when two of Moja's men arrived and told us that they had been sent to carry out reconnaissance but had run into advancing enemy troops spread out over a

wide area; they had managed to hide but had not made it back to the Mission. The attached report describes what had taken place:

> September 28
>
> Tatu:
>
> At about 10:30 today, the guardsmen began coming on foot along the road from Lulimba to the Mission, firing mortar shells and with planes bombing from the air. I was with the colonel and other compañeros at the antiaircraft machine gun; we gave the order to fire the cannon to stop the guardsmen from surrounding the compañeros at the Mission; there was no fire from the containing ambushes where the Congolese were, and they have not appeared up to now. Compañeros Tiza and Chail, who were at the Mission cooking, were able to withdraw to our position; Compañeros Banhir and Rabanini left at 4:00 to reconnoiter, and we don't know anything about them right now; we think they might have pulled back to where you are.[3] Virtually all the Congolese are lost; the idea is to rely on our own people to shoot at the guardsmen from this position as the Congolese moved the antiaircraft machine guns when the planes started shooting, and threw them to the ground when I told them to put them back in position. I assigned a Cuban to the machine gun, and I sent another of our compañeros to take charge of the artillery piece, which is located two hills to our rear. The colonel was told to bring the piece here yesterday, but so far this has not happened. Compañero Compagnie,[4] who was with Compañero Tiza at the Mission, retreated with the Congolese and his present position is not known, so at the moment there are eight of us. If we do not manage to stop the guards, we think we will retreat to higher ground because this hill is very bare. We have also heard shooting from the Fizi area, which is very strange.
>
> The compañero colonel assures me it is our people, but I take this with a pinch of salt. The guardsmen stopped at the Mission and are still there at the moment.

News from Mbili informed us that he had attacked two armored cars and destroyed one, but the enemy got through. Enemy aircraft hit them hard and caught them in a clearing, but they did not suffer any losses. The end of the report was pathetic: a number of Cubans were sick and only three Congolese were left, the rest having returned to their base. The guardsmen again broke through the ambush—this time with relative ease, as the combatants were deeply demoralized.

The next day, the radio broadcast a report from Mobutu's General Staff that a force of 2,400 men under Lieutenant-Colonel [Michael aka "Mad Mike"] Hoare was attacking in the Fizi-Baraka area, with the aim of destroying the last rebel stronghold, and that Baraka had already been taken.

For his part, Lambert announced that Baraka had been attacked, but that they had fought off the enemy and killed 20 whites and many Africans. Evidently, the Congolese themselves did not bother to count the number of dead Africans; what mattered was the number of whites. Meanwhile, another report from Lambert's front stated:

> September 29
>
> Tatu:
>
> Yesterday we talked with the colonel: we asked him to bring the cannon and mortar down to fire at the concentration of guardsmen on this side of Lulimba, and discussed the fact that they had occupied the Mission. Thus Lambert went off to get the cannon and mortar, taking Nane with him to make sure that he did not leave. I also suggested that, after shooting at the concentration, we should withdraw to the other hill so that the aircraft are not able to inflict any casualties today; yesterday they were flying quite low and the guardsmen indicated with their mortars the targets to be bombed. Compañero Nane returned at about 17:00 yesterday with two mortars and cannon, and we set up our firing positions. The colonel returned later than Nane, at about 18:00, completely drunk and

dragging along some men from the camp. He suggested that, after we had fired off the cannon and mortars, we should go down to the Mission with the men he had here and our own men because the guardsmen would retreat in the face of gunfire. We told him that would be very dangerous because the enemy certainly had ambushes and we would be virtually placing ourselves within their encirclement; moreover, the resulting confusion would lead our own men to start killing one another. But he denied this and said we had to do it; and anyway he said he had spoken to you and you had both agreed to attack Lulimba. So I told him that our men would stay here, on my own responsibility. He further said that the guardsmen would keep the blankets they had taken from the Mission, and that this should not be allowed to happen.[5] After the attack he was going to go to China. We fired the cannon and mortar rounds and withdrew to his camp, along with him and all his men.

When we talked back at the camp last night, we didn't discuss the matter any further because he was still drunk. I decided to wait for a better chance to talk. We have the cannon at a different position from the previous one. We have left an observation outpost at the place where we fired the cannon yesterday. One of our compañeros is in charge of the cannon, to stop the guardsmen advancing if they try to do so. All the signs are that the guards have set up a camp at the Mission, while others have returned to their camp, as their trucks are heading back that way. Practically the only thing we are doing is taking measures to stop the guardsmen if they try to advance again. My idea is as follows:

We should fire some shots at the Mission during the night and wait a few days to reconnoiter a little around there, as it is possible that the guardsmen will withdraw without being seen. I am keeping an eye on our men, except for the compañero who is at the gun emplacement. Today we told the colonel to get his men out of the houses early because of the aircraft and this was done. We are thinking of building a few shelters. There has been no deterioration in our relations with Lambert because what had occurred was due to his being drunk on *pombe*. We can have some contact here in the

camp, for even if we go to another position we'll always leave someone behind.

Waiting for further instructions from you,

Moja

The lieutenant-colonel's irresponsibility was appalling. What I had been told about Baraka was false; it had been lost almost without a struggle, so that the situation was growing increasingly more difficult and the projected army, with an arsenal of weapons, men and ammunition, was becoming more and more diluted. Still imbued with a kind of blind optimism, I was unable to see this and wrote in my monthly analysis for September:

> Last month's analysis was full of optimism; now it's no longer possible to be so optimistic, even though some things have progressed. Clearly we cannot encircle [Front de] Force within a month. In fact, we cannot set a date for this now. Whatever the truth is about Baraka, the mercenaries are going on the offensive and Lulimba has been transformed into a strongpoint for them. It does have a communications weakness, but it's almost impossible to make this group fight under present conditions, and the Cubans have to do everything alone. Nevertheless, Massengo appointed our friend Lambert as coordinator of the front (a man who is no use for anything, although he is obeyed by the others and he respects me). Massengo wrote me a conciliatory letter[6] asking me to write back about a number of specific problems. My struggle must be to focus on the creation of an independent column, perfectly armed and well equipped, which will be both a shock force and a model for others. If this comes to pass, it will significantly change the picture; as long as this is not achieved, a revolutionary army will be impossible to organize as the quality of the officers precludes it.
>
> To summarize, it has been a month with some advances, but optimism has receded. A month of waiting.

1. The importance that Che gives to the work of providing information and carrying out propaganda as part of the struggle corresponds to his conception of the struggle as a political and military one. Therefore he considers this one aspect of the organizational plan for a guerrilla front, as he explains in Chapter III of *Guerrilla Warfare.* This work has, in his view, multiple dimensions: it is informational, propagandistic and educational. But its significance is not limited to the phase of the armed struggle, but instead continues—and even grows and acquires additional dimensions – once the victory has been achieved and the building of a new socialist society has been initiated as counterrevolutionary media campaigns will be one of the fundamental axes of imperialism.

Throughout his participation in the Cuban revolution, Che continually promoted the work of information and propaganda. During the revolutionary war he was the founder of broadcaster Radio Rebelde and the newspaper *El Cubano Libre.* After the victory of the revolution he continued to pay special attention to this question, promoting the creation of the magazine *Verde Olivo* in 1959 as head of the training department of the Rebel Army and writing for the magazine using the pen name "*Francotirador*," (sharpshooter) which he had also used in *El Cubano Libre.* In June 1959 he helped start the Prensa Latina news agency with Argentine journalist Jorge Ricardo Masetti, and in 1963, the magazine *Nuestra Industria* when he was minister of industries.

2. Che's concept of "revolutionary truth" is in complete accord with ethics—a central axis of his political thought and practice. "Against reactionary lies, the revolutionary truth," would be the slogan at the top of all his communiqués to the Bolivian people during the guerrilla war in that country. According to Che, the truth "is the fundamental principle of popular propaganda…. It is preferable to say the truth, small as to its effective dimensions than to put out a big lie loaded down with tinsel."

3. **Che's note:** These were the two comrades to whom I referred above.

4. **Che's note:** A Rwandan combatant who had been incorporated into our force.

5. **Che's note:** The retreat on the previous day had been so sudden that the belongings of some men not there at the time (the lieutenant-colonel, Moja and some others) had been left behind.

6. **Che's note:** The word "conciliatory" is used in my diary but it is not correct because there was never a complete break or conflict between Massengo and ourselves.

A BATTLE AGAINST TIME

Our position was not favorable, and it would have been disastrous if the enemy had launched an offensive. But as fighting was taking place in the direction of Lulimba, there were reasonable grounds for thinking that we would be left alone for a while. We were located on the banks of the Kiliwe stream, near the first of the mountain foothills. Food was our main worry; we occasionally hunted game, but there was less and less of it and it was dangerous to do this, considering that we were in no-man's-land and any hunting had to be done in that spot and any shots fired would have been heard by the guardsmen. In spite of everything, they nevertheless maintained an apprehensive, almost defensive attitude.

We held a meeting with the chairman of one of the nearby villages. Each small village has its *kapita* or chief, and the large ones—or a group of hamlets—have a chairman. Our man spoke French and was quite smart. In the course of a long conversation, I presented our requests: we needed some people to go to the Lake [Base] and bring back food and other supplies; the peasants would provide us with cassava, some vegetables and raw tobacco. What we could offer was some of the food and other items brought up from the Lake [Base], payment for the food they provided, free medical care and medicines within our means, and vegetable seeds (whose produce we would share). The chairman noted everything down and held a meeting with his compañeros; after two or three days he ceremoniously brought me a signed typewritten reply with a multiple of stamps that stated he would find men to send to the Lake [Base], that they would guarantee us food and try to find tobacco, but that he could not accept payment because it was revolutionary norm that the peasants were to feed and support the army and they would keep this norm.

More news arrived from Mbili. The soldiers had passed through his lines again and once more some armored cars had been wrecked in the

action. This time they had used an ingenious device: a mine was buried in the road and the same grenade fuse suspended by a cord was the detonator, but this time the impact of the vehicle falling into a little trap released the safety catch and set off the explosion within six seconds; at least one armored vehicle was blown up thanks to this “crude device.”

I sent Siki to work as a doctor in the barrier area, as well as to assist Moja in his tasks. His first reports, like Moja’s, laid it on thick and complained of the degree of disorganization there. He was amazed by their habit—even if they expected an enemy attack—of every night, when they went to sleep, they dismantled their weapons and took the pieces away with them. They were incapable of digging trenches to protect themselves, of sleeping in them with their weapons, or simply assigning someone to guard the weapons while they slept. The cannon was regarded as personal property that went with its master, who would not sleep anywhere other than in his own home. Every morning the ordeal of mobilizing people began so that they would be promptly in position at their posts.

It was reported that they had heard some loud explosions in Lubondja. When they went to investigate what they thought was an enemy attack, they saw that a whole ammunition dump was ablaze, with the loss of large quantities of mortar and artillery shells and machine-gun bullets.

Anticipating Compañero Massengo’s arrival, Muyumba (the man who, until a short time before, had been the Revolutionary Council’s representative in Dar es-Salaam) showed up. He came to take charge of sabotage operations against the Albertville railroad in the Makungu area, and he wanted to take six Cubans with him. I reacted sharply and told him that I was waging an uphill battle to concentrate my men and forge a strong mixed army and that I constantly had to fight this kind of dispersal of our forces. (This was the first time I used the term “Congolization” in reference to the Cubans, meaning contagion by the prevailing spirit.) Such dispersal did more harm than any benefits it might bring; we had to discuss this very seriously because I foresaw a very grim future for the revolution if it kept going along this road. Our discussion, and especially my description of what was happening, had a big impact on him; he said he was willing to stay there with me and find 20 peasants to be trained, and that he would return after making an inspection of the Mukundi area. When he asked whether the recruits should be peasants without any military training, I

replied that it was much better that way; I preferred a thousand times people who were fresh and had had no prior bivouac experience, rather than soldiers already corrupted by camp life.

When Massengo arrived the next day, I spoke frankly and clearly expressed my view of the problems we were facing. I stressed that he needed to decide to build a strong and disciplined army, otherwise they would be reduced to isolated groups in the mountains. We agreed that we would establish a front in this area under Lambert's command, but that I would have an independent column. I specified that it would have to be independent of Lambert also because the consequences of his irresponsibility were already wearing me down.

We would establish a kind of combat academy. I preferred the students to be peasants. But although Muyumba undertook to increase the number to 60, it would be necessary to add some soldiers from the various fronts, which I was not so happy to do. Furthermore, we would organize a more rational General Staff that could conduct operations on all the fronts, and I agreed that we would send as advisers Siki (in the work of the General Staff), Tembo (in the task of political organization), and Kasulu (the doctor, as a French translator). Massengo asked me to write to our ambassador in Tanzania to plead with the government there because the difficulties were increasing every day. Lastly, he asked for some more Cuban cadres. I agreed in principle, but the selection would have to be done with great care; this was a special kind of war, in which the quality of individual cadres counted for a lot and it was not just a matter of numbers.

The next day, while we were discussing how to raise the Liberation Army from the ruins, a tragi-comic accident occurred: One of the men dropped a lighted match and the dry straw huts caught fire like torches, especially as the rainy season had only just begun. Quite a few things were lost, but what annoyed me most was the danger caused by the grenades exploding inside, and above all the impression of disorganization and carelessness that we gave Massengo and his compañeros. Agano, who was responsible for the fire and was one of our best compañeros, was sentenced to go three days without food.

While the fiesta of exploding bullets and grenades—accompanied by my own higher-caliber explosions—was taking place, Machadito[1] (our

minister of public health in Cuba) arrived with some letters and a message from Fidel; along with him came Mutchungo, the health minister in Soumialot's revolutionary government. They had got lost and had found the camp by the flashes and noise from the explosions. I heard about the long conversations that Soumialot and his colleagues had had with Fidel. The people from the Revolutionary Council had not been honest in their presentations, partly I suppose because that is always how it is in such cases, and partly because they had been outside the country for a long time and didn't really know what was happening inside. And as the torrent of lies began with the soldiers and grew increasingly larger until it finally reached the top, I imagine that even with the best of intentions, they could never have gained a clear idea of what was really happening. The fact is that they painted an idyllic picture, with military units present everywhere, forces in the countryside, continual battles, all totally remote from what we could see and feel. In addition, they received a considerable sum of money to travel all over the African continent explaining the features of their Revolutionary Council, exposing Gbenyé and his clique, etc. They also requested support for a number of crazy projects: apparently they had asked friendly countries for as many as 5,000 rifles, torpedo boats for the lake and a variety of heavy weapons, and inventing plans for attacks and breakthroughs that were total fantasies. From Cuba they had received a promise of 50 doctors, and that was the reason Machadito had come to look at the conditions on the ground.

I had already understood from Tembo that people in Cuba thought my attitude was very pessimistic. This view was now reinforced by a personal message from Fidel in which he urged me not to abandon hope, asked me to remember the early stage of the struggle in Cuba, recalling that there are always obstacles, and reminded me that these were good men. I wrote a long letter to Fidel, from which I will quote the paragraphs that explain how I saw matters.

> Congo, 10/5/65
>
> Dear Fidel:
>
> I received your letter, which has stirred contradictory feelings in me, because in the name of proletarian internationalism, we are

committing errors that may prove very costly. I am also personally worried that, either because I have failed to write with sufficient seriousness or because you don't fully understand me, it may be thought that I am suffering from the terrible disease of groundless pessimism.

When your Greek gift [Tembo] arrived here, he told me that one of my letters had given the impression of a condemned gladiator, and the minister [Machado], in conveying your optimistic message, confirmed the opinion that you were forming. You will be able to speak at length with the bearer of this letter, who will give you his first-hand impressions after visiting much of the front; for this reason I will dispense with anecdotes. I will just tell you that, according to those close to me here, I have lost my reputation for objectivity by maintaining an unfounded optimism in the face of the actual situation. I can assure you that were it not for me this beautiful dream would have catastrophically collapsed in a heap should be sent but.

In my previous letters, I asked that not so many people should be sent but only cadres; there is no real lack of weapons here, except for a few special ones; on the contrary, there are too many armed men; what we lack are soldiers. I particularly warned that no more money should be handed out unless it was with an eyedropper and after many requests.

None of these things have been taken into consideration, and incredible plans have been made that threaten to discredit us internationally and may put me in a very difficult position.

I will now explain:

Soumialot and his compañeros have been leading you all down the garden path. It would be tedious to list the huge number of lies they have spun, and it is preferable to explain the present situation by the attached map.[2] There are two zones where something like an organized revolution exists: the area where we are based and part of Kasai province where Mulele is based—a great unknown. In the rest of the country there are unconnected bands living in the forest; they lost everything without a fight, just as they lost Stanleyville without

a fight. More serious, however, is the way in which the groups in this area—the only one with contacts to the outside—relate to one another. The differences between Kabila and Soumialot are becoming more serious all the time, and are used as a pretext to keep handing over towns without a fight. I know Kabila well enough not to have any illusions in him. I cannot say the same about Soumialot, but I have some indications such as the string of lies he has been spinning, the fact that he doesn't bother to come to these godforsaken parts, his frequent drunken sprees in Dar es-Salaam, where he lives in the best hotels, and the kind of allies he has chosen to unite with against the other group.[3] Recently a group from the Tshombist army landed in the Baraka area, where a major-general loyal to Soumialot has no fewer than 1,000 armed men, and captured this strategically important point almost without a fight. Now they are arguing about who was to blame: those who failed to put up a fight, or those at the Lake [Base] who didn't send enough ammunition. The fact is that they shamelessly ran away, ditching in the swamp a 75 mm. recoilless cannon and two 82 mm. mortars; all the men assigned to these weapons have disappeared, and now they are asking me for Cubans to get them back from wherever they are —no one knows quite where—and to use them in battle. Moreover, they are doing nothing to defend Fizi, 36 kilometers from here; they don't want to dig trenches on the only access road through the mountains. This will give you some idea of the situation. As for the need for a careful selection of men rather than sending me large numbers, you and the commissar assure me that the men here are good and I'm sure most of them are, otherwise they would have quit long ago. But the fact is one has to be really easy going to put up with the way things are here. It's not good men but supermen that are required…

And I still have my 200; believe me, right now they would do more harm than good, unless we make a definitive decision to fight alone, in which case we'll need a division and we'll have to see how many divisions the enemy puts up against us. Maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration; maybe a battalion would be enough to get back to

the frontiers we had when we arrived here in order to threaten Albertville. But numbers are not what counts; we can't by ourselves liberate a country that does not want to fight; you have to create a fighting spirit and find soldiers with the torch of Diogenes and the patience of Job—a task that becomes more difficult, the more fools there are messing everything up along the way.

The question of the launches deserves a separate mention. For some time, I have been requesting a couple of mechanics to prevent the dock at Kigoma from becoming even more of a cemetery for broken-down boats. Of the three brand-new Soviet launches that arrived a little over a month ago, two are already out of service and the third, in which the emissary crossed the lake, is in bad shape. The three Italian launches will go the same way unless they have a Cuban crew. But this and the artillery business require the acquiescence of Tanzania, which will not be easy to obtain. These countries, unlike Cuba, are not going to stake everything on a single card, however big, and the card being played right now is feeble. I have given the emissary the task of clarifying how much support the friendly government is prepared to offer. You should know that almost everything that came on the ship has been impounded in Tanzania, and the emissary will also have to talk to them about that.

The business with the money is what hurts me most because of the repeated warnings I have given. At the height of my "spending spree" and only after they had made a big fuss, I committed to supply one front (the most important one) on condition that I would lead the struggle and form a special mixed column under my direct command, in accordance with the strategy that I had outlined and communicated to them. With a very heavy heart, I calculated it would need $5,000 a month. I now learn that 20 times that sum is given to people who are just passing through, so that they can live it up in all the capitals of Africa, with no acknowledgment of the fact that they receive free board and lodging and often also their travel costs from the main progressive countries. Not a cent will reach the wretched front where the peasants suffer every imaginable misery, including the rapaciousness of their own protectors; nor will anything get through to the poor devils stuck in Sudan. (Whiskey

and women are not expenses covered by friendly governments, and they cost a lot if you want quality.)

Finally, 50 doctors would give the liberated area of the Congo an enviable ratio of one per 1,000 inhabitants, a level surpassed only by the Soviet Union, the United States and two or three of the most advanced countries in the world. But they are distributed according to political allegiance without the least consideration given to the organization of public health. Instead of this gigantism, it would be better to send a contingent of revolutionary doctors augmented as I requested by some very experienced nurses of a similar caliber.

The attached map summarizes the military situation, so I will limit myself to a few recommendations that I ask you all to consider objectively: forget all the men in charge of phantom groups; train up to 100 cadres (not necessarily all black [Afro-] Cubans) and choose from Osmany [Cienfuegos]'s list plus whoever stands out most over there. As for weapons: the new bazooka, percussion caps with their own power supply, a bit of R-4 and nothing else for the moment; forget about the rifles, which won't solve anything unless they are electronic. Our mortars must be in Tanzania, and with those plus a new complement of men to operate them we would have more than enough for now. Forget about Burundi and tactfully discuss the question of the launches (not forgetting that Tanzania is an independent country and we have to play fair there, leaving aside the little problem I caused). Send the mechanics as soon as possible, along with someone who can steer across the lake reasonably safely; this has been discussed and Tanzania has agreed. Let me handle the problem of the doctors by giving some to Tanzania. Don't make the mistake again of handing out money in such a manner, for they cling to me when they feel hard up and certainly ignore me if the money is flowing freely. Trust my judgment a little and don't go by appearances. Shake up those in charge of providing truthful information because they are not capable of untangling this mess and paint utopian pictures which have nothing to do with reality.

I have tried to be explicit and objective, precise and truthful.

Do you believe me?

Warm greetings,

Machado and I agreed that it was impossible to have 50 doctors here, unless we organized them as a guerrilla unit. He also agreed with me about the genuinely alarming aspects of the situation as he had witnessed all the depravity at the fronts and had developed a feel for the spirit of this revolution.

I had hoped that some compañeros, such as the local minister of public health, might help to create a little order, especially because he came from the Fizi area and had some authority. But he proved to be a nobody. He remained there until the end, except for a brief time when he left on account of something to do with his work, but he kept completely detached from Massengo (I can't say which of them was to blame) and even more detached from reality. Of course, he could not occupy himself with public health; he had only the Cuban doctors, and the few medicines that arrived were for the fronts or for some primary care in the areas where our forces were based. We had once spoken with Massengo of the need to concern ourselves more with Fizi, to impose authority on the general and pay him some attention (as far as doctors and the radio were concerned, for example), but that was now history as Fizi had become enemy territory.

Moja arrived from Lubondja, where he had been to inspect the aftermath of the explosion at the munitions dump. He told us that Baraka had been lost without a fight, in his opinion, and that the cannon and mortars had been abandoned by the men in charge of them. In this case, I think it was the brand-new Bulgarian instructors.[4]

With all this information, we called a meeting with the leaders for whom a search had been made and who finally showed up. Until then we had not managed to get any cohesive action from either Calixte or Jean Ila (the commander at Kalonda-Kibuyu); I don't know whether they themselves were to blame for this, or whether the fault lay with Lambert, whose outlandish method of work precluded any proper organization. In the end, the meeting was attended by Massengo, Compañero Muyumba, the public health minister, commanders Jean Ila and Calixte, Lieutenant-Colonel Lambert, other commanders from Lambert's front, and the usual political commissars and observers. A message had been sent to Zakarias but he had not replied, so the Rwandans were not represented. What I had to say was more or less the following:

First, an introduction of those present: the minister of public health from Cuba, who had come to assess healthcare needs; Siki, the chief of staff of a Cuban army; Tembo, the party organization secretary who had left his post to join the fight here; Compañero Moja and Compañero Mbili, with a long record of struggle. My points were more or less the same as what I had said to Massengo, but I added a review of each leader's conduct. Lambert was undoubtedly a dynamic compañero, but he had to do everything himself. He had not formed an army; people did things when he was present, but made no progress when he wasn't around. I gave the example of the dead compañero. He was at the front line because his compañeros had insisted that he go and stay there. Calixte, on the other hand, had never shown up on the battlefield. Both attitudes were bad: a leader should not stay so close to the front line that he cannot survey the whole of his sector of the front and make overall decisions; but neither should he be so far in the rear that he loses all contact. To the representative from Kalonda-Kibuyu, I stated that the barrier that they claimed to have on the road was an illusion, as there had never been a single clash with the army, and hence there was no reason to keep 150 men there in such circumstances. I went on to analyze the acts of indiscipline, the atrocities and the parasitic features of the army; it was a real diatribe, and although they politely weathered the storm, no one accepted the scolding.

In discussing the meeting with me, Compañero Tembo said that in his view I had offered virtually no way out of the problems of the Congo; I had described all the negative aspects, but none of the possibilities offered by guerrilla warfare. It was a fair comment.

I also had a meeting with my compañeros as rumors had reached me of certain remarks that reflected a growing despondency; some men were saying that the Cubans remained in the Congo because Fidel did not know the real situation they were in there. I told them that the situation was certainly difficult, that the Liberation Army was falling apart and that a struggle had to be waged to save it from ruin. Our work would be very hard and thankless, and I could not ask them to have confidence in victory; I personally thought that things could be sorted out, although it would take a lot of work and we would have many partial failures. I said I could not demand that they have confidence in my leadership capacity, but I could, as a revolutionary, demand that they respect my honesty. Fidel was aware of

the fundamental situation, and nothing of what had happened had been covered up. I hadn't come to win glory for myself in the Congo, nor was I going to sacrifice anyone for my personal honor. If it was true that I had not communicated to Havana the view that all was lost, it was because I honestly did not believe that was the case. But I had expressed the men's state of mind, their vacillations, their doubts and weaknesses. I told them about the days in the Sierra Maestra when I was in total despair over the lack of faith among the new recruits, who, having sworn their unshakable commitment in the name of every saint, "cracked" the very next day. That's how things were in Cuba, at our level of development and with the strength of our revolution. Why should it not be expected in the Congo? The Congolese soldiers were there among the masses; it was our task to check out each one and find them—this was our fundamental task.

The fact that this explanation was necessary shows the ferment that had been dissolving the morale of our troops. It was difficult to get the guys to work; quite disciplined compañeros would formally follow the orientation, but they took no initiative; everything had to be repeated several times over and strictly checked; I had to use my proverbial scoldings (which are not particularly gentle) to get certain tasks performed. That romantic time when I would threaten those who were undisciplined with being sent back to Cuba was long past; if I did that now, with luck the present numbers would be reduced by half.

Tembo wrote a long letter to Fidel in which he described the situation as it was at that moment, mainly in the form of anecdotes. Machado left to return to Cuba, carrying all this material and his own perception of the reality.

As a result of the meeting with the commanders, some modifications were made to the composition of the academy: it would now have 150 soldiers—50 from each of the three fronts (Lambert, Kalonda-Kibuyu and Calixte)—plus 60 to be recruited by Muyumba from among the local peasants.

I again spoke with Massengo about Baraka and agreed to send Siki there with some men to organize a defense of Fizi, which, after some planning, would make it possible to bring all the forces there and to attack at the first point. But Siki demanded, as a precondition, that things were done seriously and that the Cubans had total command; then we could

undertake to send all the men to fight there. This ultimatum was necessary. Recently, at the time of the failed attempt to attack Lulimba, the grumbling among our compañeros had been such that if the Cubans were again left to fight alone and die needlessly many would propose abandoning the struggle because it was not possible to go on like this.

I couldn't risk an attack on Baraka unless we had all the weapons in our hands and made a serious analysis of the situation. We didn't know how many men the enemy had there, but their positions were problematic for them. They had a beachhead surrounded by mountains, in hostile territory. Something could happen there. Eventually, I almost begged Massengo to use his authority to make the people from Fizi see sense, and to write again to Kabila officially urging him to come to the Congo. It was not possible to denigrate Soumialot and his people, and at the same time to keep up the show of constant promises to come to the Congo, while enjoying feasts and orgies in Kigoma and Dar es-Salaam. I hesitated a great deal before raising such sensitive matters, but I thought it was my duty to present them to Massengo so that he could transmit them directly to Kabila. It was not our intention to lecture, but there are sacrifices that a revolutionary leader has to make at certain moments.

Massengo promised to write to Kabila, but I don't know if he did. He left with Siki for the Fizi area, while Muyumba left for Mukundi with the promise to send the 60 peasants within seven days, a promise that was never kept, although I don't know why since he showed no further signs of life.

Lambert sent me a letter in which he reported rumors that Fizi had already fallen and he asked for authorization to take 25 men; he would find another 25 on the way and recapture Baraka or, if it was already lost, Fizi. I replied that I was not able to give such permission, but that, in my view, there were many weaknesses at the front, that the enemy was about to attack and that his [Lambert's] presence there was indispensable. Besides, it was unthinkable that with 25 or 50 men he could recapture what had been lost when there had been hundreds. He was kind enough to send me a reply as he departed for Fizi with his little band.

For all these reasons, the chances of simply harassing the enemy in the Lulimba area were virtually nil; the men at the main barrier were no longer coming down to the plain. A contact group was sent to the barrier on the

Kabambare road with the aim of crossing the Kimbi River and reconnoitering the soldiers' positions from the other side, and the report came back that it was at the same general level; the lieutenant in charge of the barrier declared he could not hold his men at the position (only 25 remained); they didn't obey him and did what they liked, and they would desert if they were sent off to some military action. It was a barrier only in theory, and the group there could be discounted as a fighting force.

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1. José Ramón Machado Ventura, Cuba's minister of public health (1960-68). Currently he is a member of the political bureau of the Cuban Communist Party and first vice-president of the Council of State, the position held by Raúl Castro until he became president in 2008 following Fidel Castro's retirement.

2. The map referred to here was never included in the original manuscript.

3. **Che's note:** I was told about Soumialot's drunken sprees by people from the other group, but this does not appear to be true.

4. **Che's note:** I follow the custom in the Congo of awarding students the nationality of the country where they trained.

VARIOUS ESCAPES

We kept trying to incorporate Congolese into our little army and to give them rudimentary military training so that this nucleus might save the most important thing: the soul, the life of the revolution. But those charged with imparting the divine breath, the Cubans, had an ever weaker grip on it themselves. The effects of the climate were still being felt, as gastroenteritis was added to the endemic malaria. Until the rigors of the task got the better of my scientific spirit, I noted in my field diary my own statistics: I had the shits more than 30 times in 24 hours. Only the bush knows how many more there were after that. Many compañeros suffered from the same malady; it didn't last long and it responded to strong antibiotics, but it contributed to undermining an already fragile morale. Nor did anything happening outside our camp help to raise our spirits—not one high-minded gesture, not one intelligent action.

The few Congolese we had managed to recruit went to get a *dawa* in a nearby camp, or to be examined by a Congolese doctor (medicine man). After that, they simply deserted. This made me feel the impotence that comes from a lack of direct communication. I wanted to instill into them everything I felt, to convince them how I really felt, but having to speak through a translator and perhaps my skin color also undermined everything. After one of the frequent transgressions (they had refused to work—another of their characteristics), I spoke angrily to them in French; I rattled out the worst things I could think of with my poor vocabulary and, at the height of my rage, said that they should be made to wear skirts and carry cassava in a basket (women's work) because they were good for nothing and worse than women; I preferred to have an army of women than individuals like them. But while the translator turned the "volley" into Swahili, the men looked at each other and guffawed with disconcerting naivety.

Perhaps the most constant enemy was *dawa* and the various things it required. I called in a *muganga*, probably one of those considered second rate, but he immediately sized up the situation; he settled into the camp and happily idled away the time in a way appropriate to a first-rate *muganga*. He was certainly intelligent. The day after he arrived, I told him that he should accompany a group of men who were to spend several days at an ambush because *dawa* lost its effect with time and the men did not remain in their positions. But he flatly refused to go, saying that he would prepare a stronger *dawa* for them that would last a fortnight. Such a forceful argument had to be accepted from someone with his authority, and the men left with the stronger *dawa* which, combined with speed and the opportunity to flee, was wonderfully effective.

Several days earlier I had spoken to Massengo about practical training in the Kalonda-Kibuyu area, and so I started making preparations to send a team of Cubans who, operating in two groups, would select the best Congolese combatants on the basis of how they performed in an ambush. We would use the same system as in the area closest to Katenga, where by that time we had lifted all the ambushes because the number of Congolese had dwindled until only one or two remained. We left behind Azi, who was sick, with a couple of compañeros and concentrated the rest along with ourselves. Despite our efforts, disease and dispersal at the various fronts left few men available, so that only 13 left with Mbili for Kalonda-Kibuyu. Ishirini was the second-in-command. Compañero Ishirini was a regular soldier in Cuba, but his qualities were such that we decided to give him assignments with greater responsibility, as part of a plan for training leaders if we were able to build our army into an operational group with enough Congolese soldiers. The compañeros were scheduled to spend approximately 20 days at the ambush, but no longer, because the rigors of the climate affected the men, especially the Cubans. After that time, another group would transfer the operation to a different region, so as not to saturate the same area with ambushes, while the first group rested and refreshed. Mbili had already left to cross the Kimbi and begin operations when, within just a few hours, a pathetic little note arrived from Siki and another from Massengo. Siki’s note read:

Moja:

The guardsmen are advancing on Fizi, and there's nothing to stop them, nor do they want to stop them. We are going from Fizi to Lubondja. I'll try to bring down the bridges. Tell Tatu my trip was a failure.

Siki
10-10-65

The note from Massengo reported that Fizi had already fallen and gave instructions that the entire Kalonda-Kibuyu group should place itself under my orders.[1]

Meanwhile, some of the previous work was starting to bear fruit; a consignment of food and some medicine was brought up from the Lake [Base] by a number of peasants, and we shared some of our things with them. It was not a lot, but we were able to give them some salt and sugar, and our men had sweetened tea. A letter came from Aly with the same old story, an account of an ambush they had tried to set up in the Kabimba area. On discovering a packet of cigarettes on a trail, they turned back and finally reached the main path with their numbers much reduced; of the 60 Congolese soldiers, only 25 were left; they took prisoner some peasants who were traveling down the road (they had been instructed to clear it), and who said that a truck would be coming along in a few hours from the cement factory in Kabimba. When the commander of the Congolese detachment heard this, he decided to lift the ambush an hour before the truck passed as guardsmen might be coming; this brought the week-long operation to an end. Shortly afterwards promotions were handed out: captain to major or field commander, etc; rewards rained down on them for such an audacious action.

Siki arrived from Fizi, having conducted a forced march because of the situation. He recounted the vicissitudes of the trip. The conversations with General Moulana passed through too many mouths—Siki spoke neither French nor Swahili, and the general had no French—to have any certainty, but in summary, Siki had presented our ultimatum and argued that it was

necessary to dig trenches immediately. The existing defenses were a "barrier" consisting of three men, a man and his assistant with a bazooka and another with a *pepechá*[2] plus the usual piece of string across the middle of the road to stop anyone passing; they had not dug a trench nor done any reconnaissance. After I had spoken to Siki, General Moulana had his say and launched into an extremely sharp attack on Compañero Massengo, blaming him for everything because he had not sent arms or ammunition and had not sent him Cubans to fight. Under such conditions, he would not defend Fizi and he was not a corpse to be digging holes (fortunately, he said, he was still alive), and Massengo should bear all the responsibility. Massengo did not even react. We don't know if this was due to his lack of character or the fact he was in enemy territory (which is how this area might be described). Whatever the case, he weathered the storm in silence and that night they no longer slept in Fizi.

Some compañeros thought that the general could not be so stupid and that he must be colluding with the mercenaries. I have no evidence of this, and he remained in the Fizi area as a rebel when we withdrew. Backwardness might explain his attitude, but in reality he played into the enemy's hands.

The fact was that internal divisions were producing a number of extreme cases such as this one. The 37 kilometers of road from Baraka to Fizi crosses hills where there are many possibilities to lay an ambush, as well as a river that forms a defensive barrier that is quite difficult for vehicles to negotiate. The bridge there was already partly destroyed and only needed to be completely destroyed in order to create good defensive possibilities; at least this would have slowed down the enemy advance. But none of this was done.

On October 12 the enemy took Lubondja in a triumphal procession. Colonel Lambert heard about the capture of Fizi and set off there with 40 men, leaving some heavy weapons behind in Lubondja that were then lost in the bush. He was not open to argument, and Massengo didn't have the presence of mind to order him to stay to defend the last position preventing a link-up of the forces from Lulimba with those landing in Baraka, namely the barrier in the mountains.

When Massengo arrived in our camp, exasperated I told him that with the men I had I could not take responsibility for defending it from a two-pronged attack. Mbili had strengthened the eastern end by crossing with his 13 men on forced marches, but all we could count on were 13 Cubans on one flank and 10 on the other; to make a defensive stand would mean getting 23 men killed because the rest were not willing to do anything. At the barrier they had an arsenal with 150 boxes of the most varied ammunition, especially for heavy weapons, mortars, artillery pieces and 12.7 machine guns, and the previous night everything had been tried to get the people to work to save it. We had to threaten to throw water over them, to remove the blankets from on top of them, in short, to exert extreme physical pressure, while Massengo, who was spending the night there, was powerless to force them to work and Lambert's deputies ran off with his followers.

Massengo's response was to send Lambert a letter ordering him to return and take charge of the defense with his men. I don't know if this letter ever reached its destination, but it certainly had no effect. Soon after we heard that the position, under threat from both the Lulimba and the Lubondja sides, had fallen without a fight, and that the retreat had turned into a rout. The reaction of our men was worse than bad. The Congolese had been given weapons such as mortars for which they were responsible, and which were then lost; they showed no fighting spirit and, like the Congolese, thought only of saving themselves; and the retreat was so disorderly that we lost a man without knowing how, because his own compañeros couldn't say whether he had simply got lost or been wounded or killed by enemy soldiers who were firing on the hill over which they were retreating. We thought he might have headed toward the Lake Base or be somewhere else, until his failure to appear convinced us that he was either dead or captured. Anyhow, we heard no more of him. As it was, a great many weapons were lost. I gave instructions that any Congolese who unexpectedly turned up without orders to carry out some specific mission should be disarmed forthwith. The next day, I had a considerable amount of war booty, as if we had laid the most productive of ambushes: the 75 mm. cannon, with a good amount of ammunition; one antiaircraft machine gun intact, and remnants of another; mortar parts, five sub-machine guns, ammunition, hand grenades and 100 or so rifles. The man responsible for

the cannon, Compañero Bahasa, had remained alone at the position, but when the guardsmen advanced and he received an alarmist report from another Cuban, he had pulled back and abandoned it. The mercenaries were not advancing so rapidly, and Moja gave timely orders saving the cannon, but I sharply criticized that compañero (a party member), as well as a number of others.

With Massengo's agreement we decided that all fugitive soldiers should be disarmed and stripped of their rank; we would build a new force with those that remained, and I hoped in my heart of hearts there would be very few of them; I said I would accept only those who showed they were serious and had a fighting spirit.

We organized an assembly with the Congolese compañeros, where I told them very bluntly what I thought of them. I explained that we were going to form a new army, that no one was obliged to come with us and that anyone who wanted to leave could do so, but he must leave his weapons there, and the arsenal we had saved with so much effort would also remain with us. I asked those present to raise their hand if they wanted to leave; no one did. This seemed strange, as I had previously asked two or three Congolese (who had agreed to stay). So, keeping an eye on one of those I had selected, I asked everyone who wanted to stay to take one step forward; two stepped forward, and immediately the whole column did the same, which meant that they would all remain part of the force. I was not convinced by this so I asked them to think it over and discuss among themselves before we decided. The result of this was that some 15 men said they would like to leave. But it did bring some benefit: one commander decided to remain as a soldier (as I was not accepting former ranks), and the number of volunteers was larger than anticipated.

It was agreed that Massengo should return to the Lake Base along with Tembo, Siki and the doctor-translator, Kasulu. Paradoxically, the political situation could not have been better, because Tshombe had been killed and Kimba was making fruitless attempts to form a government. We had an ideal situation to continue fighting, taking advantage of the disintegration in Leopoldville. But the competently led enemy troops, away from events in the capital and with no serious opposition, struck out on their own.

Compañero Rafael, who was in charge of our affairs in Dar es-Salaam, came on a tour and to talk to me. We agreed on the basic issues: the signal

center would be at the site of operations and would have a transmitter capable of reaching Havana; a weekly shipment of food would be sent to the new army's base, which would be as well supplied as possible; and a compañero from Dar es-Salaam would go to Kigoma to replace Changa, who didn't speak Swahili and was having a number of difficulties; Changa would come over here and take charge of the boats.

With regard to provisions, I changed my previous attitude that had proved to be mistaken. I had come with the idea of forming an exemplary nucleus, of enduring all hardships alongside the Congolese and, with our spirit of self-sacrifice, displaying the true path of a revolutionary soldier. The result, however, had been that our men went hungry and lacked shoes and clothes, while the Congolese divided among themselves the shoes and clothes that reached them by other routes; all we had achieved was that discontent became rife among the Cubans themselves. It was therefore decided to form the nucleus of an army that would be better equipped and better fed than the rest of the Congolese troops; it would be directly under my command; it would be the practical school converted into the nucleus of an army. To achieve this, it was absolutely necessary for us to be sent regular basic supplies from Kigoma, with peasant carriers organized from the Lake [Base] to bring them to the front. It was very difficult to get the Congolese soldiers to work, and if our men devoted themselves to that task we wouldn't have any combatants.

We divided our force into two companies, led by Siwa and Azima as second-in-command, under the orders of Mbili and Moja respectively, after a minimum period of training. The basic composition would be 15 Cubans and some 45 Congolese, with others to be added as required; one company commander, three Cuban platoon commanders and three Cuban squad commanders (with five men in each squad). Thus, there would be three squads to a platoon and three platoons to a company, with a total of nine squad commanders, three platoon commanders, the company commander with his second-in-command, and a small auxiliary squad, all Cubans.

We transferred to the new camp, an hour by road from the previous one, in the first mountain foothills but still on the plain.

1. **Che’s note:** In reality, this group was never incorporated. A few individuals did come, under the orders of a political commissar who seemed to be a good guy, but who was overwhelmed by that mob. The rest had remained in the peasants’ houses. I sent them all away, including the political commissar, as I couldn’t handle any more disorder.

2. An old-model Soviet machine gun.

DISASTER

At this time, “Tremendo Punto” came to join me; his mission was to be a type of high-level political commissar. Charles, who also accompanied me, would be a more practical battle commissar, as he could work directly with the Kibembe-speaking people who made up the majority of our force. I considered “Tremendo Punto’s” presence to be very important because we were looking for people to develop as cadres. Our ambassador in Tanzania informed us of the very strong pressures that country’s government was exerting for an agreement with Gbenyé. I didn’t know what might happen, but I was prepared to continue the struggle up to the last moment; it suited me to have someone with me who would hold high the insurgent banner should we have any dealings with those people.

The new camp had a better natural environment than the previous one, but it was far from perfect. There was very little water, just a little spring that emitted muddy water, and we knew from experience the gastric upsets that this could produce. A hill rising proudly between the main road and the camp prevented wide visibility. It would have been much better to establish ourselves higher up, but all the hills appeared to have no water and it would have been a problem to transport it there for a group as large as ours. I gave orders for an ammunition dump to be created higher up, so that we would not have the burden of defending the 150 boxes of assorted ammunition that we had saved in Lubondja. I scoured the area for a suitable site and took some further precautions, such as maintaining a platoon ready to defend the upper reaches in the event of a threatened attack.

With some peasants who had joined us, we already had the germ of a third company; I thought of continuing until we had four and then pausing to assess the situation because I didn’t want to overdo the numbers until the men could be rigorously selected in combat. Local peasants came to join up

in response to Compañero Massengo's appeal; he "read the rule book" to each one individually, translated by Charles into strong language.

A note came from Machado at the Lake [Base], informing me that he could not cross because there was no boat available (in the end he left on a *motumbo* with an outboard motor). He was prepared to take Arobaini, the compañero wounded in a previous engagement, and try to save his finger which was in a very bad state. That meant another reduction in our numbers. Machado said that he had spoken to the doctors who were planning to abandon the struggle and tried to persuade them to stay another six months, until March. But when this didn't work, he decided to leave them behind anyway. This procedure was a little hasty, but undeniably effective in achieving its aim, and I totally agreed with him.

We sent two scouts to inspect the ammunition dump from Lubondja and to make an attempt to put it in a safe place; it was larger than the one we had saved at Lambert's barrier. They reported that the dump, although intact, was completely undefended. But they were proven wrong because a group of men at a weak barrier had been mobilized from the Lake [Base] to protect it.

Many scattered combatants from Lubondja, Kalonda-Kibuyu and Makungu were wandering around in the immediate area, taking shelter in villages and extorting things from their inhabitants. We decided to do something about this, and Charles was sent on a punitive trip to clear the soldiers out, demobilize them and retrieve their weapons. This was well received by the peasants who were very upset by the actions of these vagabonds that engaged in more pillaging than when they had come as a group displaying some elements of order.

We decided to start accelerated construction work and training to fill up all the spare time that both the Congolese and the Cubans had on their hands. We held two meetings to decide on a plan of action: one of the General Staff with the officers, the other with party members. The first of these established the method to be used for the military training; it defined the special features of each of the companies, drew up a list of forthcoming operations, and stipulated the means to achieve internal discipline and integration with the Congolese. The spirit among the officers was not very high; they showed great skepticism about the tasks, although they performed them in an acceptable manner. A start was made on building the

accommodation, the latrines and the hospital, on cleaning up the well, and on digging defensive trenches in the most vulnerable areas. Everything went very slowly because the rain was by now more intense, and I didn't have the resolve to make the men move the ammunition dump but waited for the upper-level construction work to be completed first—a weakness on my part that would prove fatal. At the same time, imbued with a false sense of security by the fact that the enemy was some kilometers away, we did not create outlying posts (as would have been normal in such cases) and instead the lookout stations were fairly close.

At the party meeting I again stressed that I needed their support to create a disciplined army, an exemplary army. I asked those present who believed in the possibility of victory, and the only ones to raise their hands were Moja and Mbili and the two recently arrived doctors, Fizi and Morogoro. This could be explained as due either to real conviction or a greater affinity with me, a demonstration of loyalty, in fact. I warned them that I would occasionally have to ask for sacrifices so great that their lives might be at risk, and I asked if they were willing to do so. This time, they all raised their hands.

We then proceeded to analyze weaknesses displayed by various party members, making criticisms that were accepted. When I came to the case of Bahasa, the compañero who had abandoned the cannon, he did not agree. Bahasa had demonstrated extraordinary qualities, including an unshakable enthusiasm that was a model for both Cuban and Congolese compañeros, but a moment of weakness had overcome him, the proof being that the cannon had been saved after he abandoned it. I insisted again and again, until eventually he replied reproachfully: "Okay, I'm guilty." Of course, what I had been trying to achieve was not a confession but an analysis of our weaknesses, so I asked several other compañeros for their opinion and they agreed that the alleged failing had actually occurred.

By the time I closed the meeting, I was convinced that very few people shared my dream of creating an army that could carry the Congolese cause to victory, but I was reasonably sure that there were men willing to sacrifice themselves, even if they thought it futile.

The key task, however difficult, was to achieve unity between Congolese and Cubans. We had introduced communal kitchens to replace the anarchy of individual ones. But as the Congolese didn't like our food

and continually protested (the cooks were Cuban because otherwise all the food disappeared), this led to a tense atmosphere.

Jean Ila, the commander at Kalonda-Kibuyu, came to join us with 70 men. But I already had too many people and could not accept him; I therefore sent him back to his zone with the assurances that a group of Cubans would come and directly organize the ambush on the Lulimba to Katenga road, where we were still able to carry out effective actions. I took away his mortar, an antiquated machine gun that had some parts missing, and a Soviet-model bazooka without any projectiles; he wanted to take the weapons back with him, but I ordered him to leave them there as I thought they would be more secure.

At Jean Ila's request, I spoke to his men before they left, warning them that we would have to work together and criticizing their way of behaving toward the peasants as if they had forgotten their own origins. This speech and another to our men, in which I said that anyone who deserted would be shot, did not please the Congolese. Men were deserting all the time and taking their rifles with them, and the only way to prevent this was to take very drastic measures while making it easier for those who wanted to leave to do so without a rifle.

Nevertheless, our patrols kept searching adjacent areas for scattered weapons and we managed to find a machine gun with some pieces missing; with this and one from Kalonda-Kibuyu we were able to assemble a complete one. In response to my warning and to the offer I had made at the same time, some combatants began to be discharged.

Early on October 22, the continual sound of mortar fire from the direction of Lubondja convinced us that the enemy was advancing there; we took some measures, and I sent a rather rushed letter to Massengo asking him to reinforce that position with men from the Lake [Base] so that I would not be forced to wage a defensive battle just then. In passing, I also gave him several pieces of advice (so as not to lose the habit), suggesting he should send some men to Fizi and Uvira to determine the disposition of our troops.

Word came from Lubondja that they had put the ammunition dump out of danger by dividing it into two parts: we chose one location ourselves, while the Congolese compañeros hid the rest in a place that they never felt willing to disclose to us. The Lubondja barrier needed Cubans, bazookas

and containment weapons, but I didn’t want to grant any of these requests because it would have meant further dividing our troops and their firepower.

October 24 arrived, a date that marked half a year since we came to the Congo. It was still raining heavily, and the straw huts became soaked when this happened. Some of the Congolese asked me for permission to go and look for some zinc sheets in the old camp, and I agreed. Maybe an hour passed and then we heard a volley of rifle shots and then continuous firing. The Congolese had stumbled into an enemy offensive and been attacked. Fortunately for them, however, they were not at close range and they all managed to escape. Pandemonium swept the camp as the Congolese vanished and we were unable to organize ourselves; they had gone to the *muganga’s* house to get some *dawa*, and only then did they start to take up their positions. I began to organize the defense with Siwa’s company, which was supposed to occupy the front line, and we got ready to receive the soldiers in style. But suddenly, various compañeros told me that enemy units were approaching across the mountain to encircle us; I couldn’t see any and, when I asked how many there were, I was told there were a lot. How many? It was hard to tell, but certainly a large number. We were in a difficult position; they might cut off our retreat and we would not be able to defend ourselves if the ridge was held by the enemy; I sent a platoon under Rebokate to try to halt the soldiers as high as possible up there.

My dilemma was that if we stayed where we were, we might become surrounded; but if we withdrew, we would lose the ammunition dump and all the equipment we had saved, such as two 60 mm. mortars and a radio set; we would have no time to take anything with us. My preference was to confront the enemy, in the hope that we could resist until nightfall and then move out. We were tensely waiting when the enemy came along the obvious route, opposite the Lulimba road, and we opened fire from there, but this lasted less than a minute. A compañero came running up, apparently with a serious wound, but it was actually only the result of a blow he had received when firing the bazooka. He reported that the enemy had already broken through the front line. I had to give the order for a hasty retreat; a machine gun, whose Congolese crew had fled, was abandoned by its Cuban operator, who made no attempt to save it; I sent some men to tell those on the other end to retreat quickly to somewhere safe. Then we made

off at full speed, leaving behind many things such as books, documents, food and even the two little monkeys that I had kept as mascots.

One unit did not receive the order to retreat, staying behind to face the enemy and inflicting a number of casualties; this was Bahasa and Compañero Maganga, who also managed to save the cannon; then, after handing it over to the Congolese for safekeeping, they fought on alongside Siwa, Azima and some other compañeros (whose names I don't remember). It was they who saved our honor at the end of the day. When they finally withdrew, they fired a bazooka round into the ammunition dump, but without effect.

As explained, we were retreating along one flank, evading the encirclement that the soldiers were trying to draw around us from above. Personally, I was quite demoralized; I felt responsible for the disaster because of my lack of foresight and weakness. Quite a large group of men followed me, but we sent some ahead to clear the way if there should be enemy soldiers trying to close the circle; I ordered them to wait for me on the side of a hill, but they continued on regardless and it was only a few days later that I met up again with the Cubans among them; the Congolese began deserting from the first moment. As I rested on the hillside where they were supposed to wait for us, I reflected bitterly that there were 13 of us, one more than Fidel had had at a certain moment [in the Sierra Maestra in Cuba], but that I was not the same leader as he was. With me were Moja, Mbili, Karim, Uta, Pombo, Tumaini, Danhusi, Mustafá, Duala, Sitini, Marembo and "Tremendo Punto." We had no idea what had happened to the rest of the men.

As night fell and the last shots of the soldiers who had overcome our position died away, we reached an abandoned village and grabbed some fat, well-fed hens, on the grounds that everything there would be lost the next day as a result of the enemy action. We continued on in order to put a little more distance between us and the camp, which was only two or three kilometers behind us, as we had followed a very long curve on a bad road. One or one-and-a-half kilometers further on, we found some peasants still living in another village. We took some more chickens and were going to pay for them, but the peasants said that we had all been defeated and were brothers in misfortune so they would not charge us anything for them.

We wanted someone to act as our guide, but they were terribly frightened and simply told us that they knew the doctors and another person were at another village a short distance away. We sent a man there, and he came back soon with Fizi (the doctor), Kimbi (the nurse), and two other compañeros; they had set out in the early morning to visit the villages and stopped there when they heard the sound of the battle. Shortly afterwards, a good many Congolese turned up fleeing, among them a wounded man who, after some treatment, continued on his way; everyone was heading in the direction of Lubichako. They heard from the slightly wounded man they treated, and perhaps from another slightly wounded Congolese, that Bahasa was seriously wounded. A note reached Azima explaining where they were, and after a brief nap to regain our strength, we set off with a guide who had overcome his fear. At 6:00 in the morning, we reached the little village where Bahasa lay wounded; there was a good concentration of Cubans and Congolese there.

The causes and nature of the disaster now became clearer. The men I had sent to stop the soldiers' approach on the nearby hillsides did not find them; and later, when they saw the enemy enter the camp down below, they didn't open fire because they assumed we would get out through that area in the event of a retreat (which is not what happened, due to reports that the enemy was in the mountains). Siwa later confirmed that the soldiers in question were actually peasants who had fled through the hills on seeing the real enemy approaching and that in fact the enemy never left the plain. This made my distress all the more acute because it meant that, owing to bad intelligence that disoriented our defense and the unjustifiable collapse on one of our wings, we had wasted the chance to set a really good ambush and wipe out a lot of enemy soldiers. Compañero Bahasa had been hit by a bullet during the retreat and was carried on his compañeros' shoulders to this little village.

While Bahasa was being treated, we took the sides of the hill because we were still in a valley. The bullet had completely shattered his humerus and a rib and penetrated his lung. The wound reminded me of a compañero I had tended to years before in Cuba, who had died within a few hours. Bahasa was stronger, his stronger bones had slowed the bullet down, and it didn't seem to have reached his mediastinum. But he was clearly in great pain. A splint was applied as best we could, and we began a most tiring

ascent through steep hills slippery from the rain. The very heavy load was carried by exhausted men, who did not get full cooperation from their Congolese compañeros.

It took us six long hours to carry Bahasa, terrible hours in which the men could not hold him up on their shoulders for more than 10 or 15 minutes at a time, and it became increasingly difficult to replace them as the Congolese, as mentioned, would not help and there were relatively few of us. At one point, it looked as if some soldiers were coming up to block our way and we would have to leave some compañeros to protect the wounded man's retreat; but it turned out only to be some peasants who were fleeing. From our vantage point we could see a large number of fires because the soldiers were burning all of the peasants' houses. They simply followed the path that connected the villages and burnt each one to the ground. Their progress could be seen from the columns of smoke that rose into the air, and from the shapes of peasants fleeing toward the mountains.

We finally made it to a little village, but there was practically nothing to eat there. It was full of refugees, all silently blaming the men who had taken away their security, filled them with belief in an eventual victory and then withdrew without defending their homes and fields. All this mute anger was expressed in one disconsolate and distressing phrase: "So now what do we eat?" It was true that all their fields and little animals remained down below. They had fled with only what they could carry in their two hands, loaded down with children, as always, and unable to take food for more than one or two days. Other peasants explained to me how the soldiers had suddenly appeared and captured their women, adding angrily that with a rifle they might have been able to defend themselves, but with a spear all they could do was run.

Bahasa seemed to improve. He spoke and felt a little less pain (although he was still very agitated), and was able to drink some chicken broth. Reassured by his condition, I took a photo in which his large, habitually bulging eyes expressed an anxiety that we had not known how to allay.

At dawn on October 26, the nurse came to tell me that Bahasa had had a crisis, ripped off his bandages and died, apparently of an acute haematothorax. Later that morning we had to carry out the sad and solemn ritual of digging a grave and burying Compañero Bahasa, the sixth man we had lost and the first whose body could be given the appropriate honors. It

was a mute and powerful accusation against my stupidity and lack of foresight, as had been Bahasa's brave conduct from the moment he was wounded.

The defeated little band came together and I gave the farewell, almost a soliloquy full of reproaches against myself. I recognized my mistakes and stated very truthfully that of all the deaths in the Congo the most painful for me was Bahasa’s because I had severely criticized him for his weakness and he had responded as a true communist in what he did, whereas I had not been equal to my responsibilities and was to blame for his death. I would do everything in my power to erase my failings, by working harder and more enthusiastically than ever. The situation was growing worse, and we would not be able to form our army unless we became integrated with the Congolese. I asked the Cubans to reflect that it was no longer only proletarian internationalism that should inspire us to struggle, as the support of the base enabled us to have a point of contact with the outside world; if that contact was lost, we would be cut off for who knew how long in the interior of the Congo. We would have to fight to keep that channel open.

I spoke to the Congolese later, explaining the gravity of the situation and the fact that our defeat had been due to fear of asking them to make an exceptional effort in their work. Appealing to their revolutionary consciousness, I said that there had to be more trust between us, and that we had to form a more unified army that would enable us to react more quickly to any situation that might arise. With the mournful ceremony over, we moved on to Nabikume, quite a large village located on the banks of the river of the same name, in a pleasant and fertile valley. Two tendencies manifested themselves among the Congolese: a small one, led by “Tremendo Punto,” that wanted at all costs to be closer to the base; and another, led by Charles and comprising most of the men from the region, that wanted to remain close to where the guardsmen were operating and to defend that area.

I decided to stay; to continue retreating would add new defeats to those we had already suffered and increase the demoralization of the men who had now almost lost all faith. The Cubans would have preferred to go to the base because the Lake [Base] had affected them too and they felt closer there to possible escape routes. But we stayed where we were and resumed the task of forming two companies with the men who remained. We

gathered together as many Congolese as we could, and recalled all the Cubans who had stopped off elsewhere during the retreat.

I analyzed the lessons of the disaster as follows:

> From a military point of view, the first mistake I made was to choose the camp's location without making a closer investigation and not organizing more solid defenses. There were no outposts sufficiently far removed in order to be able to fight several kilometers away from the camp. I failed to impose the extra work and effort required to establish the ammunition dump in the upper part of the site (which would have given us much greater flexibility in our actions) and to have deployed weapons such as the mortar, which was lost in combat. On the other hand, the reports that soldiers were encircling us through the hills upset all our plans and made the defense an uncoordinated operation, a confused mass of men scattered around without rhyme or reason. Our own wing, which included many Cubans, collapsed almost without a fight; this time we could not put the blame on the fleeing Congolese; we were Cubans and we retreated. When I was told that the soldiers had already reached the top of the little hill we were defending, my intention was to pick up an automatic rifle and go and fight there, but then I reasoned that this would be to risk everything on one strike and I preferred to retreat. In reality, however, they were not on top of the hill; the report had been the product of nervousness, just as nervousness had made us see soldiers when there were only peasants and large numbers when there could not have been more than 15 men.
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> From the military point of view, we lost the whole dump and its 150 or so boxes of ammunition for artillery, mortars and machine guns, as well as an 82 mm. mortar and a machine gun, two 60 mm. mortars and two incomplete machine guns, a Soviet bazooka without projectiles, a Chinese-model radio transmitter that I had finally acquired, and a lot of less important equipment; the bazookas in the hands of the Congolese were lost along with their handlers

and the projectiles, and above all the embryonic organization we had managed to achieve up to that time.

The attitude of the Congolese had not been as bad as on the other occasions. It is true that at first they all disappeared, but it was to get some *dawa*. They returned later, and there were some who gave a good account of themselves. We might have begun to select combatants from among them if the situation had not been so compromised by the defeat that made them desert after a period of conducting themselves with dignity.

From a political point of view, all the credit we had gained through our fraternal, sympathetic and fair-minded attitude toward the peasants foundered on the terrible fact that all their houses were burned. Expelled from an area where they had been able to eat, however poorly, they now had to go and live in mountains that offered virtually no food and where there was a constant threat of enemy occupation.

The local chieftains paid us back with interest. All of them—Calixte, Jean Ila, Lambert and his commanders, a commissar called Bendera, and possibly a number of headmen—began to spread it around that the Cubans were a bunch of fakers who talked a lot, but who, in the heat of the battle, retreated and left the peasants to bear the consequences. They, on the other hand, wanted to remain in the mountains and defend the key points; now everything had been lost because of those charlatans.

This was the propaganda that the commanders circulated among their soldiers and among the peasantry. Unfortunately, there was some objective basis for their insinuations; I had to struggle long and hard to regain some of the confidence of those men, who, hardly knowing me, had placed their trust in me and our people, more than in the commissars and commanders whose arbitrariness they had endured for such a long time.

THE WHIRLWIND

Our first concern was to fight for loyalty of the peasants because of the adverse conditions we confronted. The constant withdrawals and defeats suffered by our army, the maltreatment or neglect experienced by the local inhabitants, and now the malicious explanations that various commanders were using to take their revenge—all this contributed to the difficulties of our situation. We gathered together the *kapita* from the area and leading figures from nearby villages, as well as the peasants living there, and spoke to them with the help of the invaluable Charles. We explained the present situation, the reason why we had come to the Congo, and the danger facing the revolution because we were fighting among ourselves and not focusing on the struggle against the enemy. We found the *kapita* receptive and willing to cooperate; he told anyone who would listen that it was outrageous to compare us to the Belgians (which had already been said), because he had never seen a Belgian in these parts, let alone a white man eating *bukali* in the same quantity as his soldiers. The peasant's views were some comfort to us, but we had to achieve more than winning over individuals. To gain everyone's confidence, given the large number of villages in the area, I would have to spend days eating *bukali* from a bowl in each one, making success rather unlikely.

We asked them to guarantee a supply of cassava and any other food they might be able to obtain; to give us a hand in building a hospital at a nearby place away from the road that the guardsmen might use in any advance; to lend us their tools so that we could dig trenches and improve the site's defenses; and to form a little group of scouts so that we could get to know the enemy better. They readily agreed, and it was not long before quite a large and comfortable hospital was in place, on a hill protected from aircraft, and where we had dug a number of ditches to keep the tools and to prevent anything falling into the enemy's hands, as had happened before.

An unfortunate incident helped to ensure the peasants' quick and enthusiastic response to our appeal. At the Lubondja barrier, a group of Congolese decided to set up some grenade-traps for greenhorns but did not inform their compañeros; another group of Congolese passed by and fell into the trap designed for the enemy. Three slightly wounded men came in for treatment, plus a fourth with a more serious stomach perforation that they attributed to a mortar round fired by the advancing enemy. Those slightly wounded were soon treated, but the other man had to have a delicate intestinal operation in the open air, under very difficult conditions, with a constant threat from aircraft flying over the area. In spite of everything, the operation was a success and raised the respect for Compañero Morogoro, the surgeon, and allowed us to insist on the rapid completion of the hospital, at a quiet and peaceful spot where such tasks could be carried out in proper safety.

That same evening, another wounded man came in with a double perforation. What had happened? The whole group had fled when they heard the explosion; the slightly wounded man and the man with the stomach wound, who was able to help himself, also took to their heels and were later picked up by their compañeros. But no one stayed behind, possibly because his condition was too serious for him to be moved, or perhaps simply because he was terrified. With night approaching, it was clear that the guardsmen were not advancing and some of the Congolese resolved to go back closer and retrieve the weapons they had thrown away in their flight. It was then that they came across the wounded compañero and brought him to the hospital during the night. We had no lamps or proper lighting, nor adequate drugs, and so an even more difficult operation than the previous one had to be performed by the light of just a couple of lanterns on a man in a terrible physical state. At dawn, when the four perforations had finally been treated, the patient died. All these efforts, as well as our care for a woman wounded in a strange struggle with a buffalo (which was eventually killed with spears), did a lot to lift the peasants' regard for us and to help us form a nucleus capable of withstanding the malignant influence of the commanders.

The commanders continued to spread insidious rumors. The incident with the grenades, for example, was passed by "Radio Bemba" [word of mouth] in a way that suggested the Cubans had placed the devices and that

the Congolese had fallen into the trap. Such outrageous stories were the specialty of Commissar Bendera Festón, Commander Huseini and others of their ilk; Calixte and Jean Ila, along with all Lambert's people, never tired of throwing insults around about me.

At the mixed barrier at Lubondja, they would call together all the Congolese soldiers under our command and poke fun at them for being forced to dig trenches, in contrast to their own soldiers, who stayed comfortably indoors and needed to have only three or four sentries posted. They also refused to show us the place where some of the ammunition was hidden. We needed infinite patience to endure such deceit.

Commander Huseini called a meeting with all the Congolese, which someone monitored for us. He complained that I rebuked him like a child, that we divided the food brought up from the Lake [Base] only among our own companies, that we were taking away all their weapons and ammunition and eating all the maize and cassava. What would happen when the food ran out, they asked. The saddest thing about this was that they had asked us to come there.

Despicable though it was, this behavior was understandable because of our really sharp treatment of the commanders, of their ignorance and superstition, their inferiority complex, the way we had offended their sensibilities, and perhaps the pain these poor people felt when a white man rebuked them like in the old days.

Lambert's men did a similar thing and tried to confront our men directly, accusing them of cowardice and of provoking the enemy army and then running away. This certainly stirred things up and did nothing to raise our men's flagging morale. Mbili proposed several times to move away a little from the commander, so as to avoid a clash with him and the total demoralization of his men. This situation was developing everywhere; Compañero Maffu wrote me the following note from Front de Force, which I immediately forwarded to Massengo:

> This is to inform you of the current situation. I requested from the captain and the commander that we should go and cut the lines, and they responded that they have neither bullets nor food. The tinned provisions have all been consumed.

> They said the same thing after receiving your message.[1] On the day it arrived, the captain told us that the Congolese had laid an ambush for him, that they had pursued and disarmed them and brought their rifles here. The commander had been called to a meeting there, and he told me that the situation was very bad and that he could not go because the Congolese would kill him.[2] But they have two meetings a day, with lots of clapping and shouting. I thought they were preparing themselves for combat, but then I found out that the topic of the meetings was how to get out of the Congo. At first, they told me it would be next week, but at another meeting they decided to send some scouts to the lake to locate the boats and seize them. They sent a captain and 10 soldiers for that purpose. They also sent the commissar with another group to Kigoma on a different mission but with the same objective.
>
> I should also tell you that eight of the Congolese who came to a meeting were beaten, and they left only three of them here.
>
> The man who informed us didn't say whether they talked about us in the event of their leaving. He told me that if they caught him talking about this with us, they would shoot him. If I can find out any more details, I'll let you know.

With this information, I ordered Maffu to go and strengthen the base, and Azi (who was at the Makungu front) to come and meet with me.

While all this was happening, I tried to regroup my men and sent scouts to look for all the weapons that had been scattered around in the flight and not fallen into the enemy's hands: Bahasa's cannon, mortars and machine guns, which had been left for safekeeping with the Congolese and which they had hidden so that they could flee more quickly. I sent a letter to Siki in which I repeated many of the things that had been reported to me. I will quote just a couple of paragraphs to give some idea of my assessment of the situation:

> The decline of the men is terrible, and everyone wants to flee to the lake; there are probably many descending on you there; send them

back to me immediately, with plenty of ammunition. Only the really sick should stay. I have decided in principle to remain here at Nabikumo 10 hours away from the lake (Upper Base), a day and a half from Kazima, and two hours from a feeble barrier set up near Lubondja. If I were to go to the lake myself, it would be a huge political defeat because all the peasants trusted us and would find themselves abandoned. Once we have reorganized, we will be able to offer effective assistance; this afternoon we will begin shooting practice with a Soviet Mauser for which we have bullets. We lack 30 ammunition (SKS) and are short on stuff for the FALs. If you've got any, send us 5,000 SKS and 3,000 FAL rounds. If you don't have any, please let me know; the lack of news is making me desperate.

We heard rumors that three boats arrived with ammunition, that Kabila crossed to Kabimba, and that there are 40 Cubans there. Try to take as few of them as possible and send them to me. After the (objective) situation there is known, it will be possible to make a decision.

The information about Kabila had come by word of mouth from a Congolese messenger, who assured me that he had seen the Cubans and that Kabila himself had landed in the area; the letter said Kabimba, but it should have read Kibamba.

The compañeros wrote to me at length, but the letters crossed and did not really answer each other. Here, in full, is one of these from the last days of October:

Compañero Tatu

We deeply regret the death of Compañero Bahasa and sympathize with your feelings, given the circumstances surrounding his case. We are very glad that you and the other compañeros are doing well.

We hope that by the time you receive this letter we will have vindicated ourselves in your eyes for our apparent failure to send reports and materials. As you can see, the first messenger and the first letter were sent on the 21st, two days after our arrival. Not much happened and another messenger was already leaving with our

more extensive report in which we told you about the men we have at our disposal at present.

We cannot understand how you could have been so naïve as to believe that Kabila came with four boats. (At best, he was meant to have brought four big boatloads.) In fact, he remains unperturbed in Kigoma. As for the arrival of the Cubans, whoever gave you that information probably confused their wishes with reality. The only Cuban to arrive has been Changa who made two trips in the space of three or four days, after not coming for 19 days. He told us that he would like to go on making trips because he is afraid that they will abandon us and that communication via the lake will be lost. This is a new problem because I had already agreed to come, and it is due to the situation he senses both in Kigoma and here at the Lake [Base].

The messenger told us that there was a letter for Massengo but he didn't come, although we think that it is pointless to consider any idea of dealing with him because Massengo is a completely defeated man right now with no heart for anything, nor does he have the authority to give anyone orders, as he himself admitted in our talk with him yesterday. Massengo told us that not even Kabila, if he were to come, would have the authority to resolve anything because everyone blames the two of them for the disaster. We can tell you that Massengo's attitude during our talk was enough to arouse pity. He said that he didn't even have the authority to arrest those who had sent letters to combatants urging them to lay down their arms.

He attributed all this to tribal differences and things like that. He insisted that we help him find safe hideouts for weapons and ammunition, in case it is possible to relaunch the struggle in the future. If you put this together with what we have already said about his preparations to go to Kigoma (which he was reluctant to tell us about, but which he communicated to Ngenje), you will have some idea of the state he is in.

As to the situation at the Lake [Base], the [Upper] Base and Aly and Tom's front (Kazima), everything is the same as in the previous report. The only difference is that things have been getting worse every day. (But that is normal here.)

With regard to monitoring things that are being taken from here, which you mention in your letter, a detailed account will be sent to you in each report. We still have some reserves here, except for clothing (which has not arrived) and shoes (which we have only in small sizes). All we could give the 10 Congolese you sent us were some tennis shoes. Nor do we have any weapons because, although Ngenje is keeping track of everything there, it started too late and there is nothing much to check. Fifteen FALs remain in our reserves here at the [Lake] Base, but we are not sending them to you because we don't think you would want us to.

We think that our previous reports will give you a more complete picture of the general situation, viewed objectively, and that this will help you to reach a decision, as you say in your letter.

The Cubans who have come here in the last two or three days are: Israel, Kasambala, Amia, Abdallah, Ami and Agano. We are sending them all back to you, except for Israel and Kasambala, whose feet are swollen from walking without shoes. We can't send Bahati at the moment because he is still too sick. Regarding the bullets, 2,000 rounds of FAL and three boxes of 7.62 are on their way; we haven't got any for AKs.

We have been thinking that, given your situation, it might be a good idea for Tembo to transfer and join you. We also think that either you should take a stroll down here or one of us should come up and exchange views with you about the general situation. We are maintaining contact with Kigoma and Dar es-Salaam by radio.

In our opinion, everything that is happening both here and where you are is known to the enemy. This is also Massengo's view, as a lot of people—even high-ranking officers—have gone over to the enemy and we don't know the whereabouts of many others.

Something else that Massengo told us (and we agree with him on this) is that he expects an attack on the [Upper] Base and the Lake [Base] at any moment. The surprise attack they made on you confirms us in this opinion.

In Siki's estimate, the location you have chosen is very bad, and we could be cut off from each other at any moment. The barrier is in the immediate vicinity of Kaela and, as you know from earlier

reports, Kazima was captured several days ago and there are only four Cubans there along with Almari and Tom. The Congolese cannot be relied on because they just run away.

To bring some order into our messages, we will wait for your reply before sending our next one. Then we'll be aware of what you know and what you need.

Remember that there's hardly anyone left here, that we have two compañeros staffing the lakeside mortars and two at an observation point around Nganja, and that we have to post a guard here to protect the stores (the Congolese are a light-fingered bunch). They've already relieved us of half a sack of beans and a sack of salt on the way from the boat to the base.

Warm greetings,

Siki
Tembo

After receiving this letter, in answer to mine that I quoted above, I got another letter, dated October 26, the main paragraphs of which I will quote here:

The situation at the Lake and [Upper] Bases:

The following agreements came from Siki's meeting with Massengo. First, Ngenje will be in charge of the Lake Base, with all the authority inherent in that position and responsibility for its defense. He is authorized to take whatever measures he considers necessary for his orders to be carried out, and the only commanders above him are Massengo and Siki. Ngenje and Kumi have also been put in charge of everything reaching the Lake [Base] via our independent route. We attach sketches of the defense,[3] with the location of all the fortifications and the heavy weapons. As you can see, the defense has been well organized within our capabilities, which include two lines of trenches. Like me, Siki only trusts Cubans to handle the weapons because with the others there are the

same problems as elsewhere. *Hapana masasi, hapana chakula, hapana travaille* and the question is always how best to retreat. The framework for all this is Massengo's obvious lack of authority. In addition, it should be noted that the Lake [Base] has become a refuge for all the fugitives, with the resulting relaxation of discipline. At the meeting with Massengo, we discussed the organization of the General Staff. The military structure we proposed was accepted, as well as the civilian structure after some modifications on their part. Justice and finances were included under the military part. As we previously informed you, they are thinking of making you commander of operations.

We can report that we now have control of the supplies, and that the ammunition and other material are as Massengo left them with you. How long this happy state of affairs will last is another matter. We think problems will emerge soon because they request nothing for work or combat but are already asking for provisions, and there has been some friction both at the Lake and the [Upper] Bases. But we are sticking firmly to our motto "everything for the front," and insisting that anyone who wants to have the benefit of the supplies must go to the front. We also proposed solutions such as sending a third of the men to look for food in the nearby villages. Rather than solve the problem, however, they prefer to do nothing and stay hungry in their homes. They definitely have nothing to eat.

Situation at Aly's front: Kabimba

In reality, they are at Katala, a little closer to Kibamba, because the guardsmen took and burned Kabimba and then withdrew. The chief there did not allow Aly to put up any resistance, nor does he let Aly give him advice; moreover he stubbornly insists on staying close to the lake, ignoring the danger that the guardsmen might capture the hillside. Siki sent orders to Aly that the Cubans should capture them on their own in order to avoid being encircled or caught off guard. Aly's situation with the chief is rather delicate, as the chief told him it would be best if the Cubans went off to the base (on the pretext of taking a break). A Congolese political commissar told Aly in private

that the chief had called the soldiers together and said that the best thing the Cubans could do was to go away. Siki discussed all this with Massengo, and he agreed to sort things out by having a personal chat with the chief of Kabimba. A few days ago, while traveling for three days to lay an ambush on the Albertville road, they picked up some civilians and detained them. The civilians stated that an enemy supply truck was due to pass by soon, but the Congolese insisted on leaving without waiting for it. This gives you a picture of the state of morale at that front. We sent them some provisions. There are a total of 11 Cubans at that front.

Situation at Kazima

Kazima was captured by the guardsmen, as we reported before. They advanced by boat as far as Kaela, set it on fire and then withdrew. Everything was lost, including at least one antiaircraft machine gun. (It had been rendered inoperative and had been concealed by a Cuban who had been left behind by the Congolese and who, as he said, had to retreat under fire from aircraft.) We are telling you what has been reported to us. Fifty Congolese were sent with a chief to the front to place themselves under Cuban command and create a barrier. Later a commander, who had been in Cuba, turned up there with seven others, saying that he was going to Baraka. Tom, the political commissar, explained the situation to him and tried to make him abandon the idea, but he stubbornly persisted and fell into an ambush in which he and three others were killed. Almari asked Siki to go there with 10 Congolese and first-aid supplies. At the present time, there are three ambushes between Kaela and here. Clearly, given all the difficulties of ambushes with Congolese who run away, it is necessary to pressure and threaten them; they get lost, etc. Tom, the political commissar, says he didn’t start shooting them because he would have to shoot everyone. In all there are six Cubans at that front.

Communications

We make contact with Kigoma three times a day by R805 in code, at 8:00, 14:30 and 19:00. We are trying to get through to Dar es-Salaam, although it is at the limit of our range. If contact is made, it is twice a day in code. Kabila is using facilities in Kigoma to contact the base, so that now there is better leadership. It may be possible to install a microwave on a launch so that we can communicate while crossing the lake (if you authorize it). We are reorganizing telephone communications. Massengo agreed that two or three men should be sent to teach them how it works and how to repair it.

After the previous page was written, contact was made via the apparatus with Dar es-Salaam. Reception and transmission was 100 percent.

After the general report on the situation was completed, Ngenje called us from the Lake [Base] to say that Massengo was preparing to go to Kigoma. A short time later, a second call from there informed us that all the “top guys” had had a meeting with Massengo; this had been attended by Ngenje and Kumi. At the meeting, Massengo proposed that he go to Kigoma because he was the only leader inside the Congo. The “top guys” opposed this and Massengo agreed to stay. Nevertheless, we were told that preparations for his departure are continuing.

A third call informed us that they were continuing to meet; Massengo stated that he had received a message from [Joseph] Kasavubu offering him a ministry. The message said that a ship was waiting for him a short distance from Kibamba, and that he had only to take a boat and board it. According to Massengo, he replied that his brother Mitoudidi had died in battle and that he was willing to die also.

Ngenje and Kumi are on the alert, with instructions to inform us of anything that takes place. Massengo is putting all the problems that are raised with him to the Cubans, saying that they are the ones who can fix things. He even avoided dealing with Aly’s problems with the chief at Kabimba (which he had been asked to solve), saying that Tembo would have to sort it out.

Tomorrow, Siki and I will go and talk to Massengo, acting as if we knew nothing about these matters, in order to see what he says.

Meanwhile, we remain on a state of alert.

We have informed [Oscar Fernández] Padilla of these events in code by radio, so that he can be on his guard, because we assume that if they have approached Massengo they must also be working on Soumialot and Kabila. The first time he contacted us from Dar es-Salaam, Padilla already requested a report on the latest events and the situation at the Lake [Base], and also—something that struck us as a little odd and may be starting to make sense—he asked us to send him our views of Kabila.

Obviously the points toward the end of this report were highly alarming, implying that Massengo was on the verge of giving up the struggle. I wrote back the following:

Tembo and Siki:

I will reply to your letter point by point, and then I'll make an assessment of the situation here and the other matters.

The international situation is not so bad, regardless of any betrayal by Kabila and Massengo. Soumialot's declarations are good and so we have a leader there; I spoke to "Tremendo Punto" so that if Massengo leaves, he will take charge and organize a full-scale resistance. With regard to Kabila's plans, there is no problem as long as he does everything over the radio; if there is a conflict, we will censor him and see what happens. By no means must we leave the base now. You should ask Dar es-Salaam about the outcome of the interview with the Tanzanian government.

As to the Lake and the [Upper] Bases, the sketch of the defense indicates that they are very vulnerable to attack from the side. The machine guns should have a clear field of fire on land to defend the flanks, and trenches should also be dug there. Attempts should be made to ensure that the heavy weapons are manned by staunch Cubans,[4] which is not the same as regular Cubans, as I have learned from my own painful experience here. The hillsides giving access to

the base should be reconnoitered and defenses set up there. Be as strict as possible about the supplies.

With regard to Aly, I sent a note for him to join in the defense; with them and Maffu's men, we will have enough there and you can deploy them in such a way that we will have some reserves. Don't forget the bare hill overlooking the base; it is one of the keys to the defense (where the mortars and antiaircraft machine guns are located).

With regard to Kazima, I have already told you about the reconnaissance that I ordered to be conducted. I think that unless the guardsmen get a move on, we can surprise them there as soon as I reorganize my outfit a little.

With regard to communications, that is great news, but it strikes me as excessive to contact the other side three times a day and Dar es-Salaam twice a day. You won't have anything to say to each other before long; the gasoline will run out and the codes can always be discovered, not to speak of the base being spotted from the air. Leaving aside the technical conditions, which have to be analyzed on the spot, I would recommend one normal communication daily with Kigoma and the specification of a fixed hour for exceptional contact, plus once every two or three days with Dar es-Salaam. This will allow us to save on gasoline. The contact should be at night, and the apparatus should be protected against attack from the air. I think the microwave is a good idea, with simple codes that are changed frequently.

When I received the above-mentioned report on Massengo, I spoke with "Tremendo Punto," as I said I would in my letter. He broke down and said that he was not the right man to take over the leadership; he didn't have the temperament and was too high strung; he was willing to die there in the line of duty, resigned to his fate, almost like a Christian martyr, but he was not capable of doing more than that; that was something his brother Muyumba could do. It was then decided to write to Muyumba, but the situation couldn't be explained in a letter because of the danger that it might fall into enemy hands; so he was asked to come and discuss some important matters.

The letter went off with two messengers but we never found out if it reached its destination because we never received a reply or heard anything more of the bearers.

I want to note that all these reports about Massengo seem to me somewhat exaggerated. The way he continued to behave with me makes me think that the reports from Siki and Tembo (which were not first-hand but came via others) had been blown up out of proportion through nervous anxiety, mistrust, a lack of real direct communication across the language barrier, etc. I am also reminded that on October 27, a day after the letter arrived from Tembo and Siki, Massengo himself sent me a long letter in which he listed all the precautions taken throughout the front, the peasants who had been asked for and the defensive measures that had been adopted. And he added a phrase: “Whatever happens, let us always be optimistic.” Of course, these are only words, but it does indicate a state of mind very different from that attributed to him in our compañeros’ report and much closer to his real attitude, unless he was faking it quite masterfully, which seems out of character. I had decided to have nothing to do with Tembo and Siki’s appeals when, on the night of the 30th, I received a peremptory letter from them dated October 29. Here are some extracts:

> Luluabourg Base, October 29, 1965, 18:30 hrs.
>
> Tatu:
>
> We are sending you this urgent message because since 12:00 today seven aircraft have been constantly bombing us and dropping large objects that look like gasoline tanks in the direction of Kabimba and the Jungo area near the lake. This usually precedes an advance or a landing, and so we are warning you now before it’s too late. The bombing forced the machine gunners to retreat, and one of them has not been seen again. Ngenje will investigate and inform us immediately.
>
> As we said in all our previous reports, we have no confidence at all in the “Congos” who are defending the lake, especially as their demoralization is growing all the time. Many of the Cubans at the Lake and [Upper] Bases are sick and their number is not enough to

mount a strong defense that would allow us to maintain our sole and vital communications base with the outside.

In our previous reports we tried to present the most objective possible picture of the prevailing demoralization, so we don't think it is necessary to stress this again, but you should be aware that things are quite alarming in this respect. Every shameless element from the fronts has taken refuge at the lake, joining the shameless ones already there. There is a large number of prisoners, despite the fact that, as we wrote yesterday, there is an even greater number of criminals and traitors that no one is capable of arresting. Massengo (who still has not left) sends frequent daily messages asking Kabila to report on the loyalty of certain officers. Another frequent accusation is that some officers are urging the "revolutionaries" to lay down their weapons and spreading the rumor that Soumialot is a good friend of Kasavubu.

As we said in our last report, we don't at all like the position you are in; we know that the guardsmen may seize roads away from the lake and leave us isolated. We think that the best solution would be to have a barrier where you are and to transfer the bulk of the Cubans here.

In our view, we are writing to you sufficiently regularly and keeping you informed about both the international situation and the situation here. We seem almost like two old gossips. Please do the same with us, as we are always anxious for news. (Then we will be three old gossips.)

Siki and Tembo S.A.

We decided to head off to the base. Mbili would remain as commander of that area, stationing himself at the first barrier. Rebokate would form a second line of defense at the place where we had our camp, with a good number of Congolese undergoing training. This training was very basic, of course—shooting lessons, because the poor guys couldn't hit a cow at five meters, and a bit of basic drill. We spoke to the peasants, who understood our decision perfectly; they felt secure with the men who were remaining,

and with the doctors staying on at the hospital to look after the Congolese wounded and some sick Cubans. It was a very friendly farewell.

Another month, October, had passed, and in my diary I wrote the following:

> A month of unmitigated disaster. The shameful fall of Baraka, Fizi, Lubondja and Lambert's front was compounded by the surprise they gave me at Kilonwe [sic Kilombwe] and the loss of two compañeros, Awirino (missing) and Bahasa (dead). All this would have been insignificant if the Congolese had not completely lost heart. Nearly all their officers have run away, and Massengo seems prepared to weigh anchor. The Cubans are not much better, from Tembo and Siki to the ordinary soldiers. Everyone justifies his own guilt by shifting it onto the shoulders of the Congolese. But on top of my own mistakes, the Cuban combatants have shown some grave weaknesses in combat. It has also been very difficult to achieve cordial relations between them and to get the Cubans to shake off their scornful elder-brother attitude toward the Congolese, with special rights regarding provisions and burdens. In short, we are entering what may be the final month, when we will make a final push.

My remark about relations between the Cubans and Congolese arose from the fact that the cooks, being Cuban, gave special helpings to their compañeros, while the Congolese tended to be the ones who carried certain heavy loads. We had not established entirely fraternal relations, and we always felt a little bit superior, like people who had come to give advice.

We made the journey to the base in two days. On the second day, as we passed through Nganja, we learned that planes had machine-gunned here the previous day, killing about 30 cows whose corpses were scattered around the area. As we were making the most of this by consuming a good chunk of meat, Mundandi arrived and we had a serious talk. I told him that his idea of fleeing was crazy right now, that Rwanda's fate was bound up with that of the Congo, and that he would have nowhere to continue the struggle, unless he was thinking of abandoning it altogether. He admitted

that it was crazy, saying others had proposed this to him, but he had dissuaded them and had come specifically to discuss a sabotage operation against the power lines to Front de Force, thereby focusing the enemy's attention on that point.

On reaching the base I discovered a climate of defeatism and open hostility to the Congolese. This gave rise to some serious discussions with the compañeros; they had a long list of all the officers who had fled to Kigoma, which was not exact but clearly reflected the reality of the situation, in other words, the cowardice of the officers, their disdainful attitude to combat and their treachery. But the list also included unfairly the names of some who were firm right up to the last moment. The following two notes give some idea of the mentality prevailing at that time; one is a letter from Tembo to a compañero that suggests the recipient's state of mind and the letter he must have written (which I do not have and never read).

> The Base, Thursday, October 28, 1965, 13:00 hrs.
>
> I received your note. Although it is not dated, I assume it crossed with one I sent you via Compañero Chei.
>
> You were writing after the painful loss of a compañero who, I'm not going to deny it, deserved a death no less glorious but more useful.
>
> Your lines reflect the state of mind produced by recent events and the picture of desolation and liquidation offered by the so-called "Congolese revolution." This worries me. I want to tell you quite frankly what I think and ask you once more to have confidence in me, although I cannot assure you that this confidence won't end suddenly in a new misadventure.
>
> I know that you aren't a jerk. On the contrary, I think you are a revolutionary who will do your duty whatever the circumstances. So I won't appeal to your resolute character, which would be pointless and absurd, but I would like to remind you of the old saying that "Caesar's wife must not only be above reproach but also appear to be above reproach." You mustn't allow anyone to think that your views about the situation, or about the particular measures taken to address the situation, imply that you feel defeated and have no heart

for the struggle. You must keep yourself at a peak of combat-readiness, and your attitude should conspicuously serve as an example and an inspiration for other compañeros in the difficult circumstances in which we find ourselves.

It is possible that there are some things you don't understand and that measures are being taken that you consider misguided, but you should not conclude that Tatu and the other compañeros in charge aren't aware of the real situation that is so objectively clear. Don't forget that, at difficult moments, it is necessary to take extreme measures to preserve morale and avert a debacle.

Siki and I have sent an extensive report to Tatu, which he is probably receiving right now, telling him in great detail of how things stand. It is possible that, after reading it, he will decide to come and speak to us. If not, I will go to speak with him personally by next Thursday at the latest. Meanwhile, we must keep our spirits high and set an example of calmness, confidence and courage. You can rest assured that everything possible will be done to solve the problem in the most revolutionary and effective manner, as befits Marxist-Leninist leaders.

I have more confidence than ever in Tatu, and you should feel the same way.

I won't say definitively that he can't make mistakes. But if he makes a mistake, after discussing it, our duty is to follow his directives, whatever they are. I'm not joking when I say that it is a thousand times preferable to die in battle, even if we think it's for a useless cause, than to create a spectacle of defeat by refusing to fight. Cuban revolutionaries can die, but they cannot become frightened.

I hope… I am sure that you will do your revolutionary duty as a soldier, a Cuban and a man and that you will do this not only by fulfilling your duty personally but also as a responsible leader through setting an example to others.

Venceremos! [We will win!]

The other note, dated the first of the month, is addressed to Tembo.

Comrade:

I am sending you these lines of greeting from a trench three kilometers from the *askaris* [soldiers]. I also want to let you know about the situation here: the Congolese are trying to pick a fight with us and speaking badly of Tatu; they blame him for the burning of the peasants' homes, for the loss of weapons, the lack of food and the errant life of the peasants.

On our side the disenchantment is total. I have learned that a majority of the Cubans who came with Tatu will request a meeting with you and propose leaving. This is the attitude of 17 men here, plus seven in the group that has arrived. Emilio, this attitude has become almost universal among the compañeros; we struggle to convince them that now is the time for maximum firmness, but there is great disenchantment, great mistrust and an immense desire to get out of the Congo. They base themselves on the attitude they observe among the Congolese, for whom the struggle seems to be over. The compañeros suggest that things have turned out this way because of Tatu, and they see little desire in him or his attitude to find an exit from this situation.

This is what I want to tell you, so that your assistance can be as effective as possible.

Politico

As can be seen in this last letter, there was an almost complete disintegration of the troop; some party members were even proposing to hold a meeting to discuss a withdrawal. I was extremely sharp in my response, warning that I would not accept any such demand or any meeting of that kind and would treat it as treachery, and that I would even regard as cowardice any act of allowing such proposals to circulate. I still had a remnant of authority that maintained some degree of cohesion among the Cubans; but that was all. But much worse things were happening on the Congolese side. During this time, I received a letter from Jerome Makambile, a "provincial deputy and people's representative on the CNL," in which he accused Massengo of murdering women and, having presented

the case at length, invited me to meet him in Fizi to assess the situation in that area. At a time when communications with abroad were in greater peril and we had a central point and a General Staff to defend, this gentleman was firing off letters left and right (I received several from him) to organize the meeting. The following paragraph gives some idea of the limbo in which the revolution was then hanging:

> I take the liberty of reproducing for you here the aspirations, wishes and proposals of the entire population in the Fizi region:
>
> 1. The people demand that the military power of our revolution should be entrusted to the friendly forces that are coming to help us until the country is stabilized.
>
> 2. The people request intensive aid from friendly countries consisting of:
>
> a) military operations, personnel, weapons, equipment, money, etc.;
>
> b) technical assistance, engineers, various kinds of technicians, doctors, etc.;
>
> c) social assistance, teachers, traders, industrialists, etc.

The idea of handing all the military power over to Cubans was nothing other than an attempt at sedition using us as cover and had no origin other than tribal differences between these people and the Kabila-Massengo group—unless the enemy had a hand in it.

The only news that altered this absurd and gloomy picture was a report from Aly that he had engaged in two battles and inflicted a number of casualties on the enemy. All this was in spite of continual rows with the military commander of the region and the fact that, in practice, he and his group of compañeros had had to carry out operations against the army alone. In one of these, they captured documents outlining the enemy's plans and several maps, as well as a radio, two mortars, a bazooka, four FALs, a Super-FAL, ammunition and reserves. It was a good attack, a harsh blow for the enemy, but it was not enough to alter the situation. Among the captured papers was the following document.

2.

SECRET

ORDER OPS No. 2

Ops South Map scale 1/200,000 No. 1 Bendera

Map scale 1/100,000 Katenga

1. Situation.

a) Enemy forces:

1) Enemy bttln. (± 360 men) under command of Captain Busindi, mostly composed of Babembe and a group of Tutsis (Rwandan) in Katale.

2) One pltn. (± 40 men) dressed as ANC:

Weapons: Chinese-made sub-machine guns; they picked up six traveling peons in the week of September 27, [19]65, 7 kilometers from Kabimba and forced them to carry sacks to their position (camp) along the Mama-Kasanga-Kalenga road.[5]

b) Friendly forces:

— The 5th Col. has occupied Baraka and will maintain the Baraka-Fizi-Lulimba line.

— The 9th Commando has occupied Lulimba.

— The 5th Inf. Bttln. has occupied Bendera.

— Detachment of (+ volunteers) 5th Cd. + I police pltn. (± 30 men) is occupying Kabimba.

— The 14th Inf. Bttln. (—) holds the rail and occupies Kabega-Maji-Muhala.

— lst Cpy. 14th Bttln. + one cpy. 12th Bttln. occupy Albertville.

Air force:

The air force (WIGMO) is supporting operations with:

— 4 T-28s and 1 helicopter.

— 2 B-26s temporarily based in Albertville.

— Extra air support may come from the WIGMO squadron (4 T-28s based in Ngoma) if absolutely necessary.

— 1 DC3 FATAL, an air supply section, in Albertville.

Navy:

4 PT boats + Ermens-Luka (will prevent rebel elements crossing the lake throughout the operation).

c) Mission:

2nd Para-Bttln. (—) will execute movement from Albertville to Kabimba and take up final position.

2—Phase 2:

2nd Para-Bttln. (—), with help from Chief Mama Kasanga's warriors, will reconnoiter north and north-east of Kabimba to locate enemy positions.

3—Phase 3:

2nd Para-Bttln. will carry out a raid to wipe out rebels north of Kabimba, including the rebel base at Katale.

Intelligence about the enemy

1) Katsheka: + 300 Tutsis assisted by ± 50 Cubans. The stores are to the north of the Katsheka River, under the command of Joseph Mundandi (Rwandan).

Weapons:

2 × 81 mm. mortars (one under repair)

2 × recoilless 75 cannon

2 × .50 antiaircraft guns

2 × .30 machine guns

30 automatic rifles + bazookas

Stock: 200 boxes of ammunition + 100 mines

2) Makungu: Position on the side of the hill. ± Babembe assisted by Cubans from Katsheka under command of Calixte (Mubembe). Arms comparable to Katsheka.

Stocks: ditto.

3) Katenga: Bivouac position in the forest. ± men (Babembe and others).

4) Kibamba: Enemy base by side of lake, bordering villages; port of arrival for supplies coming from Kigoma. EM rebel general (Javua).

Training center for new recruits.

Connection: telephone network from the hillside to the lake/ [Kionga] to Balabala.

5) Katale: North Kabimba; ± 300 men, former inhabitants of Albertville assisted by 12 Cubans. Commanded by Captain Businde [sic] (from Albertville).

Weapons:

2 ×75 recoilless canon

2 × 81 mm. mortars

12 ×.30 machine guns

150 AFN rifles

3 antiaircraft batteries

6) Lobunzo: ± 600 men, commanded by Colonel Petro (Mubembe).

Important store in the house of Chief Kilindi.

7) Kabanga: store and port (ships entering the Luvu estuary).

8) Kalonda-Kibuyu: occupied by rebels.

9) Fizi: administrative center.

10) Simbi: supply and instruction center.

11) Stores and port.

Their aim was to occupy the entire lakeshore and destroy our installations near Kigoma. Furthermore, apart from a few errors, it was clear they had a very accurate idea of our weaponry and manpower, as well as the number of Cubans. In other words, the enemy intelligence service worked perfectly, or almost perfectly, whereas we had no idea what was happening on their side.

The picture presented when I arrived at the base was not at all encouraging. We knew what the enemy wanted to do and we did not need to capture those documents to find this out; it was already clear and the spectacle of our collapse was truly terrible.

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1. **Che's note:** This refers to a message urging them to carry out sabotage actions as soon as possible.
2. **Che's note:** This was the meeting over which Massengo presided referred to above.
3. The diagram referred to was not included in Che's original manuscript.
4. Underlined and emphasized in the original.
5. **Che's note:** A reference to the failed attempt at an ambush described above.

A STAB IN THE BACK

We took initial precautions to turn the base into an impregnable redoubt, or at least into one that could be taken only at the expense of heavy enemy losses. Scouts went out to reconnoiter all the hillsides in the direction of Rwandasi, and to create a route connecting it with the road to its south that goes directly from Nganja to the lake. We ordered the construction of a series of well-protected wells; Cuban compañeros worked on these, and the idea was that all the equipment could be hidden there if we had to evacuate. The most vulnerable areas were protected with a line of freshly dug trenches.

When I arrived, I checked the organization of the radio equipment; this consisted of an apparatus with quite a long range that wasn't very practical under those circumstances, with 12-volt batteries charged by a small generator; this made it necessary to have a large reserve of gasoline. The apparatus reached Dar es-Salaam, although weakly, and got through perfectly to Kigoma. The three compañeros responsible for transmissions (Lieutenant Tuma, the telegraph operator and the mechanic) performed their task capably. From October 22 (the day it began to operate) to November 20 (the night we left the Lake [Base]), they transmitted 110 messages in code and received 60. The total dedication and efficiency of these compañeros contrasted with the atmosphere of dereliction of duty and extreme apathy prevalent in our force. It is a fact that experienced men with a love for their work (although, it is only fair to say, on the margins of the daily struggle with the Congolese soldiers) were able to achieve magnificent results. And in spite of the qualification just noted, I would venture to say that if all the cadres had been of the same caliber, our performance—if not the final result—would have been different.

I spoke to Massengo by telephone as soon as I arrived, and he seemed in good spirits. His first proposal was to attack Kazima; this was his "pet

idea.” I responded that we would discuss it the next day. I went down to see him and we had another conversation about the subject. I had been informed by the scouts, Nane and Kahama, that there were no guardsmen in the village, and I told him this. But he had different information that Captain Salumu’s men were close by and were reporting directly back to him; he insisted that guardsmen were there. We could not reach agreement about an attack and postponed the matter until fresh reconnaissance could establish the exact situation.

Commander Mundandi showed he was willing to meet my demands for improving the protection of the base, such as conducting a sabotage operation to cut the power lines, and sending me one of the cannon in their possession, while he concentrated on the defense of Nganja so that some men could be released to go to Kazima. He asked, in return, for some uniforms, shoes and food, and requested some Cuban technicians to carry out the sabotage, to handle the cannon and to help the Rwandans in their tasks. I promised to send him six men. Tom (the political commissar) and Aja would be responsible for destroying the electricity poles with a flare; Compañero Angalia would fire the cannon simultaneously at Front de Force as a diversion and try to hit the water pipe; and Achali would lead the group.

We received a cable advising that some important messages were coming for me, so I decided to wait at the Lake [Base]. I took the opportunity to have a good many talks with the cadres who remained there. One of these was Colonel Anzurumi, chief of staff of the Second Brigade (General Moulana’s brigade), who had always been in conflict with Lambert and the people at Kibamba Base, including Massengo, who never trusted him. I criticized him sharply and urged him to change his attitude. I referred to the loss of Baraka without a fight (he had been present there) and showed him the result of all the intrigues and disorder, and recalled that he had frequently offered to have his men train in heavy weapons at the lake but had not sent a single one. He took note of my advice, including my recommendation to send off a few men quickly to recover the cannon from the Karamba barrier and take it to Kibamba as part of a battery of heavy weapons; he had been pestering me with stories about how it had been saved from our disaster; now, after many adventures, it showed up with 13 shells. Changa arrived at dawn, his entrance having long been heralded by

tracer bullets in the sky from a veritable naval battle that had broken out when he was surprised by patrol boats. He was carrying a man who had been wounded in the hand by a machine-gun bullet, and Changa himself had a face wound from the recoil of a bazooka that his compañeros had fired. The Congolese crew was very scared when they arrived, and it was difficult to get them to return in the days that followed.

A messenger came from Rafael simply to bring me this note.

> Compañero Tatu:
>
> This morning Pablo was summoned by the government to be told that, in view of the agreements at the meeting of African heads of state[1] concerning nonintervention in the internal affairs of other countries, both they and other governments that have previously been giving aid to the Congolese liberation movement will have to change the nature of their support. Consequently, they have asked us to withdraw what we have here, as our contribution to this policy. They recognized that we [Cubans] had given more than many African states. They stated that nothing would now be given to the Congolese liberation movement until such time as we have withdrawn, and then the president himself will call the Congolese leaders to inform them of the decision taken by the African states. A report about this has been sent to Havana. We wait to hear your views.
>
> Greetings,
>
> *Rafael*

This was the *coup de grâce* for a moribund revolution. Because of the character of this information, I said nothing to the Congolese compañeros. I waited to see what would happen in coming days, but in conversation I hinted at the possibility of a change in Tanzania’s policy by referring to such things as the blocking of supplies in Kigoma. On November 4, a telegram arrived from Dar es-Salaam.

Letter from Fidel is being sent with messenger. Its main points are:

1. We should do everything except what is absurd.

2. If Tatu considers our presence is becoming pointless and unjustifiable, we should think of withdrawing. We should act in accordance with the objective situation and our men's spirits.

3. If you think you should stay, we will try to send whatever human and material resources you think are necessary.

4. It worries us that you mistakenly fear that the attitude you assume will be viewed as defeatist or pessimistic.

5. If it is decided to leave, Tatu can maintain the status quo while returning here or staying at some other location.

6. Whatever the decision, we will support it.

7. Avoid total annihilation.

But at the same time another telegram arrived:

To Tatu

From Rafael

Message received on the 4th. Whatever the new situation, Tshombe's white mercenaries will remain in the country, attacking Congolese the people and committing all kinds of crimes and villainy. It would therefore be treason to withdraw our support from the Congolese revolutionaries unless they demand it or decide to abandon the struggle.

The compañeros who received these two cables were not yet aware of the contents of Rafael's letter and felt there was a certain contradiction between them; the first summarized a letter from Havana in reply to the one I had sent on October 5; the second was in response to the report from Dar es-Salaam on the new attitude of the Tanzanian government.

We drafted a reply to Fidel, which was transmitted by radio from Dar es-Salaam.

> Report to be sent by radio to Fidel:
>
> Rafael:
>
> During the days of your visit, Julio Cabrera Jimenez [Awirino] disappeared.[2] We thought he had made off in haste because of the nature of our retreat, which didn't seem to present a major danger despite the fact that it had the features of a rout that have colored our actions of late.
>
> He has not reappeared, however, and we must give him up as dead or captured, the former being far more likely.
>
> Immediately after the retreat, I gave Rafael Pérez Castillo[3] a harsh warning for having abandoned the 75 mm. recoilless cannon, which was saved by the Congolese. Conditions were very bad at the new camp, but I relied on the guardsmen's apparent immobility, and the work on establishing a dump at a distance for all the recovered ammunition was very slow. On the 24th, as if to celebrate our sixth month in these parts, the guardsmen advanced with the intention of burning down peasant hamlets, an intention that they carried out. We learned of their presence when they clashed with some Congolese who had left the camp. I ordered immediate resistance, so that we might hold out until nightfall and save the ammunition, but I was then informed that a large number of guardsmen were outflanking us through the hills, where I had not posted any defenses because I had not thought they would come that way. This disrupted the defense and we had to change our lines rapidly and send a squad to engage the guardsmen on the hillside. In reality, however, we discovered later that they had been advancing along a road to our front and the supposed guardsmen had been peasants fleeing across the hill. The defenses were strong enough to stop them, but our people retreated and I was told that the guardsmen had already reached the camp, which was not true; the retreat was scandalous, and I even lost the supply of tobacco. Only one unit did honor to our army and resisted

for another hour, although by then its inferiority in terms of its number and position was quite clear; one of these men was Rafael Pérez Castillo (Bahasa), who extracted his cannon from the danger zone and continued fighting with a FAL. He was seriously wounded, and we had to carry him along appalling roads, longer and worse than those in the Cuban Sierra. At dawn on the 26th, when he seemed to be over the worst, he died. In the setback, we lost a 12.7 machine gun (abandoned by a Cuban who had been left without his Congolese assistants) and all the ammunition; we also lost the trust of the peasants and the rudiments of organization that we had begun to acquire.

At this time the guardsmen began to advance on all sides, giving the impression that they were preparing a final assault on our base. But this has not happened and the defenses are quite solid, at least in terms of weapons, although we lack ammunition and the Congolese recruits cannot be relied upon.

We hold a quadrilateral area in the mountains, framed by the following points—which you may be able to locate on a map—and are in enemy hands with our own forces close by: Baraka, Fizi, Lubondja, Lulimba, [Front de] Force-Bendera and Kabimba. The enemy has outposts this side of Baraka and Kabimba. Aly attacked them on three occasions on the Kabimba front, and the second time he captured their general orders for an offensive designed to take our base and clear an area 25 kilometers around it, while four PT boats (Ermens-Luka) guard the lake to prevent supplies from reaching us. Their aircraft consists of eight T-28s, two B-26s and one DC-3 for reconnaissance and back-up, and a helicopter for liaison. This little air force is sowing terror among the Congolese comrades.

From a military point of view, the situation is difficult insofar as our troops are collections of armed men without the slightest discipline and with no fighting spirit; but the terrain could hardly be better for the purpose of defense.

Today I have just been appointed area commander of operations, with full authority to instruct the troops and to command our artillery (a battery of 82-type mortars, three recoilless 75 mm.

cannon, and 10 AA 12.7 machine guns). The Congolese officers' morale has improved with the succession of defeats, and they have become convinced that they have to take things seriously.[4] I have prepared them for the news from Tanzania, as if I were speculating about the Accra Conference and the fact that the Tanzanians are not handing over the weapons in store there. Some people here say they are prepared to risk their lives and maintain the revolution at all costs. But we don't know the views of Kabila, who has been saying that he will come here soon. I have received Fidel's recent cables; one seems to be a reply to my letters, the other to the last communication from Tanzania. With regard to my letter, I think there has again been some exaggeration; I tried to be objective but I was not entirely pessimistic. There was a time when all the Congolese officers were said to be on the point of leaving en masse; I had decided that in such an eventuality I would remain here with around 20 carefully chosen men (the goat can't give any more milk), send the rest to the other side, and keep on fighting until something developed or all possibilities had been exhausted. In that case I would go by land to another front, or avail myself of the sacred right of asylum on neighboring shores. Faced with the latest news from Tanzania, my reaction was the same as Fidel's: we cannot leave. Moreover, not a single Cuban should leave on the proposed conditions. There should be a serious discussion to settle matters with the Tanzanian leaders.

These are my proposals: Either a high-level Cuban delegation should visit Tanzania or Tembo should go from here, or there should be a combination of the two. Their argument should be more or less the following: that Cuba offered aid subject to Tanzania's approval; that Tanzania accepted and the aid has been effective. This was unconditional and without a time limit. We understand Tanzania's present difficulties, but we do not agree with what is being proposed. Cuba will not go back on its promises, nor can it accept a shameful withdrawal that would leave our unfortunate brothers at the mercy of the mercenaries. We would abandon the struggle only if, for well-founded reasons or from *force majeure,* the Congolese

asked us to do so, but we will fight for this not to happen. It should be pointed out to the Tanzanian government that the accord that has been reached is like the Munich agreement and gives neocolonialism a free hand. In the struggle against imperialism, there can be no retreat and no deferment; force is the only language understood. If the Congo were to stabilize under the present government, Tanzania would be in the dangerous position of being surrounded by more or less hostile countries; the revolution here might exist without Tanzania, but only at the cost of great sacrifice; we would not be responsible if it were destroyed for lack of aid, etc., etc.

It is appropriate to demand that the Tanzanian government maintains telegraphic communications; that they allow boats to depart with food once or twice a week; that they permit us to bring over two speedboats; that they give us some of the stored weapons for a one-off shipment and let mail through once a fortnight.

I raise the matter of the boats because the situation has become desperate. The little Soviet ferries are very slow and the enemy has speedboats; we have to shoot our way through, and last time Changa arrived wounded and one of our men was hit in the hand. The boats have to cross in twos because they frequently break down en route and one has to take the other in tow. Tanzania will certainly not accept such a situation (of daily combat), and for that reason it will be necessary to keep the boats on our side of the lake, bringing them out to collect things and return the same night. One of the boats must be transportable over steep mountains, in case we temporarily lose control of the lakeshore. We should insist on retaining our present ability to have somewhere in Tanzania known to very few people, where we can go at night and leave before daybreak, so that with good boats, this would just appear to be one of the smuggling operations that are common on these shores. But our method is to play fair; and we need to keep out of trouble so that we can devote ourselves to the important things. We also recommend giving the Soviets and the Chinese a copy of the final text in order to forestall any maneuver to discredit us.

Don’t worry about us. We will bring honor to Cuba and we won’t be annihilated, but I will certainly shake off a few slackers as soon as our position becomes clearer.

Rushed, warm greetings to all from all.

Tatu

P. S. I think you should talk to Karume to see if an air base can be obtained, either in Zanzibar with a stop-off in Tanzania, or just in Zanzibar. The type of aircraft will have to depend on what is achieved. One idea that might be acceptable to Tanzania is to have doctors at Kigoma Hospital, so that they can move around with some degree of freedom. They should speak English, be professional and good revolutionaries, or come close to this prototype. That’s it.

Concerned about the inefficient command structure, I proposed a plan for a small, flexible General Staff that would actually be of some use; but in the discussions we had with all those in charge, Massengo argued it was impossible to change things so quickly as a few days earlier a structure had been devised in which Siki would participate and this was still waiting for Kabila’s approval. It was as if my operational idea had been for a General Staff like that of the Soviet Army on the eve of the capture of Berlin, but my only option was to give way. I asked to be given responsibility for training and for the attempt to create a practically oriented school, but instead I was appointed head of operations (theoretically the second rank in the army command) and given responsibility for the organization of artillery and instruction. The command post was to be taken with a large pinch of salt, but I did what was humanly feasible to detain the collapse.

Azima’s company, which had fallen apart after the disaster on October 24 and the flight of most of the Congolese, was brought back up to its complement. But now we didn’t have weapons; while we had been making fruitless efforts to organize a nucleus of fighting men, an enormous quantity of weapons and equipment in Kigoma had been haphazardly distributed without any prior agreement, so that the supplies and stores at the base were

at rock bottom. Thus all our woes were now compounded by a lack of firepower. There were some reserves of 12.7 bullets and mortar shells, but nothing for the artillery and, most important, no ammunition for our most widely used rifle, the SKS or *point trente* in our jargon.

Nevertheless, doing the best we could, we organized the ammunition stores and took measures to distribute the weapons and form an artillery unit. Maffu, who had arrived from Mundandi's zone, was sent to Kisoshi (between Kazima and Kibamba) to try to give the defense a little cohesion.

Before leaving, he related a hair-raising experience. One night two Congolese emissaries turned up in the camp from Calixte's base nearby. Because it was already late, our compañeros invited them to stay the night there, but they explained that Mundandi had asked them to spend the night in his hut and they headed off. The next day they failed to appear. When Mundandi was asked about them, he said he had sent them away because they had tried to trick him into thinking they were political commissars, whereas they had been ordinary soldiers. A short time later, two Rwandans who had not been seen before in the camp appeared wearing those compañeros' blue jackets and helmets, which the Rwandans normally don't wear. Calixte then sent someone to find out where his men were, as they had not returned to their base. All this suggests that they were murdered by Mundandi's people for some motive that is not clear, whether it was a simple case of robbery, or because the differences between these groups had become so extreme. I told Massengo of my suspicions, but nothing was done because of the sudden rash of unfortunate events.

We received a letter from Mbili at the Lubondja front saying that the Congolese were exerting huge pressure on his men and he did not think he could hold out much longer; the demoralization was very great.

He warned me of a plot to ask me to allow some Cubans to withdraw from the struggle. The political commissar Karim wrote me an emotional letter explaining that, if he had sent Tembo the previously mentioned note, it had been to warn us about the situation and that he himself would make every effort to fulfill his duty; he attached a list of compañeros who were proposing to pull out of the struggle—a majority of those with Mbili. Subsequently, some of the men with the best record of conduct to that point then made the same request to Mbili personally, but he managed to persuade them to withdraw it. Mbili himself wrote a note defending the

political commissar from what I had implied when I said that I would treat as cowardice any toleration of open defeatism on the grounds that Karim was helping him a lot in a difficult and thankless task.

Meanwhile, Aly arrived from Kabimba to explain his conflicts with the officers there. After talking to Massengo and “Tremendo Punto,” we decided that the latter should go with Aly to ascertain what was happening and, if necessary, to put another Cuban in his position of command or to withdraw all the troops. I wrote to Mbili authorizing him to put some distance between himself and the men at the Lubondja barrier. Meanwhile, we continued to make improvements to the defenses at the base, preparing gun emplacements and trenches, and waiting for the moment when the guardsmen appeared in force and we could deliver a heavy blow. The six men who were to go and work with Mundandi were warned to stay together and split up into four and two only at the moment of an engagement; they were told to risk their lives only to the extent that the Rwandans did because I was wary of yet another instance of the duplicity that we had come to expect.

A telegram from Kigoma informed us that Vice-President Kawawa was there and that he had spoken with Kabila; according to the latter, he had promised support, asked what else was needed, and given assurances that the lake would be opened. If Kabila’s statements were true, then Tanzania’s attitude was even more incorrect.

We heard that there were 150 guardsmen at Kazima and there was a proposal for an attack signed by the political commissar of the Congolese forces there.

In another communication, Mbili informed us that some men he sent on reconnaissance had not detected any movement; they cautiously moved forward until they realized that the guardsmen had already withdrawn from Lubondja and left behind only an appeal to the population to lay down their weapons. He immediately gave the order for more reconnaissance, noting that there was no one at the former emplacement at Lambert’s barrier, nor had any enemy forces been seen on the road to Fizi; shortly before, large-scale movement of vehicles had been observed in the area. With the field now open, Lambert showed up with heroic tales of attacks, enemy losses and captured weapons, and announced that he had Fizi and Baraka surrounded with some 900 men, and that he wanted to collect the cannon,

the mortars and the antiaircraft weapons to launch an attack. He was told that the mortars had been lost in the retreat and that the cannon had been sent to defend the base. In his letter Mbili explained he “would have liked to tell him everything that needed to be said, but I considered that it was not a good moment because of the nature of the situation. Once again we had to play the role of simpletons with these people.”

We had an antiaircraft machine gun at the barrier, and this was quickly sent to the base so that Lambert couldn’t claim it. Given all this new information, Mbili was ordered to go to reinforce the base and to leave only one group of men under Rebokate at the training camp located two hours away from the primitive barrier. It remained to be seen what would be the next step taken by the men who were retreating because they would obviously not give up the prize so readily.

Mbili also send another report about a meeting that Lambert held with his men. According to an observer who had managed to slip in, Lambert explained to them that he and 23 combatants had stopped the guardsmen in their tracks, that he had then left 150 men there with the Cubans but they had failed to do anything and had even lost all the heavy weapons. He also announced that the enemy was offering 500 francs[5] and the possibility of a job for every soldier who gave himself up; he asked the combatants what they thought of this, and they said they did not agree with it. Lambert then warned them not to fall into the trap and, according to the informant, used quite a good argument; the men’s attitude seemed firm on this point. He criticized me for retreating to the base and advised the officer in charge to gather together all his men and weapons because they would be needed. This, too, was a direct attack on us which, despite his firm stance and his readiness to continue fighting, was designed to sow discord.

I had another talk with Compañero Massengo. Again I didn’t tell him about the new disposition of the Tanzanian government. We mainly discussed the idea of an attack on Kazima and, in this connection, I stressed again that more reconnaissance was needed before such a decision was taken. I was not happy about the proposed attack, fearing that it could become a rout and cause a further drop in morale. First, I wanted to be sure that there would be some heavy weapons to keep the enemy under fire and to prevent a counterattack.

On November 10, Hukumu suddenly turned up and reported that, after carrying out a mission to Lubondja, he had been joined in Nganja by some Rwandans who said that Front de Force had fallen into enemy hands. Shortly afterwards, the Cubans who had been with Mundandi arrived and informed me that, while they had been preparing to go down and carry out a sabotage operation, the Rwandan guards had reported the appearance of the enemy's first assault troops, guided in three groups by peasants from the region. Mundandi decided not to mount a defense because of the difficulties of the position, but he was able to save nearly all his weapons and ammunition and took refuge in Nganja. He asked our compañeros to stay on, but Achali misinterpreted my orders and immediately returned to the base. Having spoken with them and explained that, now more than ever, we needed them to support the Rwandans, I sent them back again under the command of Tom, the political commissar. The next day, we got news that Makungu (the camp) had fallen in the same manner, and Calixte, the commander of that sector, joined us with his men.

It was important for us to hold onto the Nganja area, not only because it gave access to the base, but because we needed the cattle there now that the lake was more and more cut off and we were running low on food. We still had three animals that Compañero Nane had brought, but if that road was closed to us, we would be in quite a predicament without any kind of reserves. Meanwhile, we hastily prepared our little artillery unit under Compañero Azi, which had three mortars and quite a lot of shells, a cannon with 13 shells, and two 12.7 machine guns (one without a tripod) and plenty of ammunition. With all this, we thought we could resist the attack on the area and try to inflict quite a few losses on the enemy.

I sent Compañero Moja to check out Kisoshi and the adjacent areas, and the first thing he reported was that some planes passing overheard had strafed them and that all the Congolese compañeros had abandoned him. He also said that there were three enemy boats in a menacing position; but there was no danger.

The supply ship was not crossing the lake, and Changa informed me that this was because it had nothing to bring. This provoked a series of fiery telegrams from us to Kigoma and Dar es-Salaam. I also sent a telegram to Cuba that said:

> Enemy pressure increasing and attempt to block lake continuing. Substantial quantity of Congolese money urgently needed to prevent isolation. Offensive continuing and advancing. Necessary to move fast. We are preparing to defend base.

This was dated November 10. The following telegram was sent at the same time to Dar es-Salaam and Kigoma:

> If as result of offensive we have to retreat and lose contact with you, don't fail to call us daily at 12:30 and at 5:00 p.m. until contact is reestablished.

We heard from Kigoma that Kabila would not be coming because his boat was not in working order. This was supposed to explain why he had not arrived on the 9th as he had said he would do without fail—another of Kabila's long list of unkept promises. At the same time, he sent a note to Kiwe telling him to prepare to go with him to the Tricontinental Conference in Havana.[6] Make of this what you will.

Our defensive disposition at that time was the following:

Mbili, with a group of Rwandans under his command, controlled the road leading straight from Nganja to the lake, while the road that passed by the base was defended by Azima and the Congolese.

Moja was responsible for defending the Lake [Base] from Kazima, and Aly in Kabimba. We had what seemed to me a reasonable chance of resisting the enemy, when I received the following note from Compañero Mundandi:

> Comrade Tatu:
>
> With regard to the situation, which is very serious, I must tell you that I am unable to maintain the position and ensure its defense. The local population has already sold out and given cows to the enemy soldiers, and is now beginning to work with them, so that the enemy is better guided and has better intelligence about our position than we have ourselves. I beg you to understand: I have decided to order

a retreat; I am not abandoning the Cuban compañeros, but I must assume my responsibility to the Rwandan people. I cannot expose all the Rwandan comrades to annihilation. If I did, I would not be a good revolutionary commander because a good revolutionary (let alone a Marxist) must analyze the situation and avoid a war of attrition. It would be my fault if all the comrades were wiped out. I sought to help this revolution so that it would be possible to make another one in our country. If the Congolese won't fight, I prefer to die on the soil of the Rwandan people. If we die on the way, that is alright too.

With revolutionary feelings,

Mundandi

Mundandi was thus preparing to abandon the struggle definitively. This worried us because it was the flank (in the Nganja area) where we could reasonably expect the enemy to attack, and that is where we would be most weakened by this desertion. Just when we thought we had stabilized our defenses, a new turn of events turned everything upside down again.

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1. This refers to the second ordinary session of the assembly of heads of state and governments of the Organization for African Unity (OAU) held October 21–25, 1965, in Accra, the capital of Ghana. During the meeting Joseph Kasavubu, who was still president of the Congo, announced that the rebellion in his country had practically ceased, making it possible to send the white mercenaries back to their respective countries. In view of this decision, the African countries decided that they should put an end to their aid for the Congolese rebels. This was codified in the "Declaration on the Problem on Subversion," signed by the participants, in which they committed themselves to not tolerate "any subversion originating in our countries against another state that belongs to the Organization of African Unity." It also banned "the use of our territories for any direct subversive activity against any member state."

2. The indications are that Che used here the false name that appeared on the passport, instead of the real name (Francisco Semanat Carrión) of the combatant known as Awirino in Swahili.

3. Che uses here the false name on the passport of Orlando Puente Bayeta, which was the real name of the combatant who used the Swahili *nom de guerre* Bahasa.

4. **Che's note:** This optimism of mine was unfounded.

5. **Che's note:** A little more than a dollar at that time.

6. The first Tricontinental Conference of Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America was held in Havana January 3–15, 1966, with the participation of more than 500 delegates. As a result of the conference the Organization for Solidarity with the Peoples of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL) was founded as well as the Latin American Solidarity Organization (OLAS) on October 16, 1966. The Tricontinental Conference and the organizations that emerged from it represented an important effort to promote solidarity and the coordination and unity of the struggles of Third World People against colonialism, neocolonialism and imperialism. Che consistently argued for the need to break the isolation of Third World peoples and unite their struggles, put most succinctly in his "Message to the Tricontinental" published in April of 1967 that stated, "Create two, three, many Vietnams, that is the watchword." See: *Che Guevara Reader* (Ocean Press) and also Che Guevara's article, "America from the Afro-Asian Balcony," published in the September–October 1959 issue of *Humanism* magazine.

THE EASTERN FRONT SINKS INTO A COMA

It was already November 12 when I received the following letter from Massengo:

> Comrade:
>
> After yesterday's telephone conversation with you, I see nothing wrong with Comrade Moja's proposal, in other words, I think it's a good idea.[1]
>
> Nevertheless, I still insist that my own proposal should be discussed. That is:
>
> First, some artillerymen should be made available to me, their number to be communicated later.
>
> Second, I should be loaned 50 FAL rifles to give to trusted people: 20 rifles to the 20 unarmed combatants stationed in Rwandasi; 10 rifles to the Kibamba school; 20 rifles to the Kavumbwe barrier; 20 rifles to combatants that you see fit to bring down from the [Upper] Base.
>
> My main objective is to launch an attack on Kazima, and in spite of the present difficulties. I am willing to assume this responsibility.
>
> In the present circumstances, I think that the Cuban comrades should mainly concern themselves with the defense of the Lake Base and Nganja. I believe you will agree with me about everything that flows from this.

There were a number of problems with this letter. Apart from the arithmetical mistake of requesting 50 rifles and handing out 70, it was based on Congolese wishful thinking about our FAL reserves that was contradicted by what we had already told Massengo. We had distributed as

many as 15 rifles to the Congolese compañeros, and at that time there were only one or two left in reserve. We had distributed the others with considerable misgivings because they had belonged to compañeros in charge of handling heavy weapons who would now be left unarmed if we lost those pieces or if we were forced to retreat and leave them in a safe place. Not believing us, Massengo insisted on the figure of 50 or 70. And after assuring us that he would take responsibility for the attack, he advised us to concentrate on defending the lake and Nganja. This was just a few days after I had been given wide powers as head of operations in the region, which implied that I should concern myself with the whole defense of the front. The lack of trust persisted.

In addition to the aspects of "disloyalty," there were a few other problems with the letters such as the order to lay anti-personnel mines on some of the access roads against my express request to delay the action until it could be properly coordinated in a way that avoided accidental injury to our patrols; and Massengo's refusal to accept that Aly should concentrate his forces in Kibamba to defend the southern end of the base from attack.

I spoke with the chief of staff again, and on this occasion, too, I didn't mention the semi-official attitude of the Tanzanian government. I stressed that our strategy had to make us independent of the lake, and insisted that my position as head of operations was purely theoretical. We talked about the attack on Kazima, for which he accepted responsibility as chief of staff (although I thought it was not the right time to attack there, especially as the very poor reconnaissance work of both Congolese and Cubans meant that we had no precise knowledge of the enemy positions). But I could not accept being relegated to the defense of one sector because—as is obvious—defense has to be united and harmonious with a reserve that can be moved to the points of greatest danger in a rapidly moving turn of events. Finally, I recommended several times that no weapons or ammunition should be given out to phantom units that would simply lose them. I said that most of the reports about major actions at Fizi and elsewhere were a pack of lies.

Compañero Massengo complained about our attitude at Kazima, where things were tense following an attempt to make the Congolese forces withdraw. In fact, I had ordered Moja to concentrate all the Cubans in

Kisoshi as a reserve force and he had interpreted this to include the Congolese as well; they refused to obey and in the process some parts of a mortar vanished, so that it was left incomplete in the hands of its Cuban operator.

Massengo promised to call Salumu in for an interview with Moja and agreed that he should lead the proposed attack in line with a simple plan: an advance at one or two points, with ambushes at others where reinforcements might come or the soldiers might try to flee. He would try to ensure that the attack would cost as little as possible should there be a sudden disorderly retreat. He also consented to allow Aly to come, and agreed not to distribute ammunition without a precise idea of why it was needed.

In the course of our conversation, I showed him the letter from Mundandi. He was furious and said he would go there in person the very next day to disarm him. Knowing what the Rwandan compañeros were like, I immediately wrote to Mbili so that he could prepare things there, ask them for the heavy weapons still in their possession, and say that I guaranteed they could cross to Kigoma if they handed over all their arms. Wanting to avoid a senseless spilling of blood at this tense time, I thought I could influence Massengo to allow their smooth passage. No blood was shed because Massengo could not go there himself and promised to send a political commissar. In the end, no one went to disarm Mundandi.

We also had a talk in which Massengo assured me that Kabila would be coming in the next few days. My reply was categorical: Kabila would not cross over because he could see that things were coming to an end and had no interest in coming under such conditions. Our conversation on this sensitive point was awkward because other compañeros were present, but my views were made more than clear about the arrival of the commander-in-chief.

The people in Fizi continued their undermining activity throughout all this, as if it was an election period in a war-free country. Two or three more communications arrived, one suggesting that I attend a meeting on the 15th and asking me to acknowledge receipt. In reply, I explained that I thought the meeting a waste of time and that it would be impossible for me to attend as I had to defend the base at all costs. I said I considered these events as a revolt against the revolutionary power. My government, I stated, had not

sent me to take part in such activities. Things developed to such an extreme that, in one of their letters accusing Massengo of murder, they nevertheless guaranteed to respect his life during the time he was in Fizi. So members of the army were promising to respect their commander's life! That was now the state of affairs.

The minister of public health, Compañero Mutchungo, also showed that he had taken leave of his senses when he sent some letters that provoked violent responses on my part, and then came to explain it.

In one of these letters, he said that Lambert had written to him denouncing our removal of the heavy weapons and asked for them to be returned so that they could carry out some actions; I had to entangle myself in a lengthy discussion of Lambert's attitude in this whole business. A second letter referred to a meeting of peasants in that area (Jungo), and informed me of the outcome of the meeting. I was not invited and had no reason to go to such meetings that did not fit in with my work, but the list of requests was so absurd that I must have provoked a reaction on Compañero Mutchungo's part. For example, point three said:

> Request to our friends:
>
> Each friendly country should send us 12,000 volunteers. These are revolutionary countries. Tshombe is fighting us with the help of foreigners.

Assuming that the number of friendly countries was two or three, this would have meant 24,000 or 36,000 men. This could be considered a children's game, as this was a meeting of peasants with a minimal level of development and who were desperate because of the situation they faced. But it should have provoked some reaction from Compañero Mutchungo, given his position as minister of public health and a leading representative of the Supreme Council of the Revolution.

After pointing out the childish nature of the proposal, I asked him if he was aware of the Fizi compañeros' liquidationist tendency. He replied that he had heard something, but what he did know was that 300 men were marching from Fizi to reinforce and save Kibamba; these statements made it impossible to continue discussing such matters. Moving on to more

personal topics, he complained about Massengo's attitude and said that he was refusing to evacuate his wife and six children, which was creating a very difficult situation for him. I discussed this with Massengo, and it was decided that all the combatants' wives and children would be evacuated to Kigoma at the first available opportunity.

Changa crossed the lake in the pre-dawn hours of [November] 14, this time without incident. He brought abundant provisions and a message for me from Rafael explaining that the situation remained the same with regard to the attitude of the Tanzanian government, which was waiting for a reply from us; it had given no sign of trying to rush things or of changing its attitude. Rafael asked whether I thought that, given the Tanzanian government's attitude, it might be wise to start establishing a clandestine base. I answered immediately saying that this should be done.

That same day Massengo, who was still unaware of Tanzania's explicit decision, sent the following telegram, illustrating the general situation and his own state of mind, in particular.

> Kabila:
>
> Military situation very grave. Mundandi front invaded by enemy, who are advancing on Nganja in direction of base. Mundandi, Calixte and Mbili have taken up position in Nganja. We have enemy infiltration on many roads in direction of base. I am notifying you of food shortage. Send urgently beans, rice, salt. We insist on immediate dispatch of weapons and .30, Mauser, "*pepechá*" and mortar ammunition, artillery, bazooka and anti-tank shells, and mine fuses. Favorable possibility for encirclement of enemy offensive at Mukundi. Lack of immediate supplies threatens our force with annihilation. I request energetic intervention with Tanzanian authorities. We consider crushing of Congolese revolution negligence by African countries. Consider this final appeal. To prevent starvation, send financial aid.
>
> *Massengo*

Apart from the optimistic statement about the possibility of an offensive at the Mukundi front, for which there was a lack of relevant information, Massengo's telegram summed up the situation. Our own telegrams almost gave a sense of panic, partly to activate the compañeros and partly as a result of the actual situation. When our man in Kigoma consulted me about Kabila's request to go to Dar es-Salaam, I responded:

> Indispensable that they (ie the boats) come today, we are hungry and surrounded, Kabila can go.

The SOSs circulated with the utmost pathos. Among the impedimenta brought by Changa were 40 Congolese who had been studying in the Soviet Union. Full of themselves, they promptly asked for a fortnight's leave complaining that they had nowhere to put their suitcases and that no weapons had been laid out for them; if it had not been so tragic, it would have been rather comical to observe the cast of mind of these kids in whom the revolution had placed its faith.

Massengo subsequently put these elements under my command, and my only satisfaction was to read them the riot act with perfect clarity now that we were able to speak in French. But there wasn't an atom of revolutionary spirit in them. I got the officers to come to the Upper Base, and put things to them very sharply. I told them that they would be tested in shooting and that those who passed the test would go straight to the front; if they were happy with this, I would accept them, otherwise they should pull out because I didn't want to waste any time (and we didn't have any to waste). The leader among them, who was quite reasonable, accepted the conditions and over the next few days they went up to the base to strengthen our defenses or, more accurately, to take the weapons of those who fled (for they had come unarmed).

The latest intelligence from Mbili was that scouts had seen the guardsmen near the Jungo road, and so he had sent some compañeros to lay mines at the start of the road. This mine-laying was dangerous for our men because Mbili was doing it on one side of the road and I had sent scouts out on the other side in the same direction. It was only by chance that a mine

didn’t explode under the feet of one of our own men. This machine had no pilot; each part moving under its own momentum.

From the Nganja-Kananga area it was possible to head toward the lake on four different roads; we didn’t know along which one the enemy would make his push, or if he would come along all of them. They even had the advantage over us in knowing the terrain; they had the better guides, in the shape of local peasants who lived among them and supplied them with food. By this time the soldiers had learned some lessons in countering guerrilla warfare, and they seemed to be treating the peasants with the greatest deference, while we were paying for past errors by suffering the consequences in the form of their current disloyalty.

Following his custom of sending us all the groups of men who showed up around there, Massengo treated me to a seven-member suicide squad whose desire for destruction was directed toward the sinking of a transport ship that linked Albertville and Kigoma. I explained to them that the operation was relatively easy and could be carried out at any time as the ships did not travel in a convoy, but I thought it very inappropriate to do this when relations with Tanzania were so cool and it could become a pretext for further restrictions. But I had other tasks for them: to cross behind enemy lines with some Cubans to carry out actions and capture weapons; but in this action they would be subject to strict discipline. They said they would think about it and I never heard from them again.

Changa had problems crossing the lake. Each time there were more boats keeping watch, and his Congolese crew hesitated to face the dangers of the crossing. Some annoying situations developed because, after the order had been given to evacuate the women and children, among the “children” were some aged 20 to 25 who shoved everyone else aside and took control. As the ship made two or three attempts to leave, situations like this occurred night after night and gave rise to friction with our men who were responsible for the ship’s security, as well as causing demoralization among our men.

A message came from Kabila that said:

Massengo:

> I am passing on your message to the Tanzanians. I leave today for Tabora and will return immediately with weapons and ammunition. I am sending you all the remaining Congolese money. The strangulation of our struggle is a plot between the authorities here and the imperialists. There is no money.
>
> *Kabila*

Kabila says here that he was going to Tabora, but he told us he was going to Dar es-Salaam, and that is what he did. He went to have talks with the authorities, but at the time of the disaster he was not in Kigoma but in Dar es-Salaam.

On November 16, Compañero Siki received the following letter from Azima:

> Compañero Siki:
>
> These lines are to explain that I have only 16 Congolese and nine Cubans; it is very difficult to retreat, and the position we have is completely open; there is no way of withdrawing in order to hide from the aircraft. The Congolese are planning to leave; they won't fight. I hold them here with a gun; as soon as the soldiers start advancing, they will be off. I am telling you this because the situation is very difficult; forgive me for saying so, but l think I have lost my nerve. We are forcing those who don't want to fight and I don't think that makes sense; I honestly don't think it is right to do this. I don't have any great knowledge, but it seems very bad to me. Besides, there is no food, there is a meat crisis, there's nothing to give them to eat. And it rains every day; it starts pouring in the morning and there's no shelter. Well, forgive any spelling mistakes I may have made.
>
> *Azima*

I thought this was a very worrying letter and I ordered Siki to go and investigate. His view was that this was just one of Compañero Azima's frequent outbursts. My doubts made me send Kisua up there, Aly's second-in-command, who had arrived with Aly and his men from Kibamba, in order to take charge of the defense in case Azima was in a very bad way.

"Tremendo Punto" arrived at the same time as Aly, having traveled with him. He sent me a letter explaining that the tense situation in Kabimba was due to Aly's character and recounted a number of incidents that occurred there. He said that he had done everything possible to create unity, and that relations with the other Cubans were friendly, but that Aly and the major did not see eye to eye. Then he repeated these statements in person and related some anecdotes, but Aly reacted violently to these claims, recalling, among other things, a funny episode arising from a lack of caution on the part of "Tremendo Punto"; he had insisted on traveling on the lake by day, against Aly's advice, and they had hardly left the shore when an aircraft appeared on the horizon. Quick as a flash, Compañero "Tremendo Punto" jumped into the water with such force that he overturned the boat; but the worst of it was that Aly didn't know how to swim and nearly drowned. His resentment against "Tremendo Punto," expressed in frequent interruptions to his story caused by his stammering with outrage, was very comical in those tragic moments.

Mbili sent me fresh reports explaining what he had done at the Jungo junction; there had been an enemy advance, and neither the Congolese nor the Rwandans had taken their positions. There were eight Cubans on each of the two defensive wings, and it was not possible to count on many other defenders. Commanders Calixte and Huseini remained at the rear, despite being urged to accompany their men. Mbili trusted only the Cubans—and them not even completely—to defend the position. He estimated there were 400 guardsmen confronting them, and it appeared as though they had some reinforcements.

Such was the situation on November 16 when various telegrams were dispatched. One of these, signed by myself, said:

Rafael:

> We urgently need SKS bullets, 75 mm. cannon and Chinese bazooka shells; if possible, 200 rifles with the corresponding ammunition. The former is very important. They are blockading things in Kigoma. If they're not going to let them go, they should say so straight out. Insist on clear language. Changa cannot leave here. There are enemy ships. We need to act fast.

Massengo sent another:

> Impossible for me to carry out offensive. So planned evacuation enemy siege impossible. Must stress gravity of situation. Request urgent information about possibility of provisions, weapons and ammunition.
>
> *Massengo*

The situation was growing more difficult every moment and there were no favorable signs anywhere. We simply had to wait and see how large the enemy forces would be, and how determined they were to push things to a conclusion.

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1. **Che's note:** To defend the base from the north.

THE COLLAPSE

Siki conducted another round of inspections and reported that it had gone quite well; the defensive positions were good and it was possible to fight while carrying out a gradual retreat as it did not make sense to organize a fixed defense with men in such a low state of morale. He said that the Congolese could not be trusted, but the Rwandans had reacted quite well and would support Mbili; the only thing they requested was not to mix them with the others; they had given all kinds of assurances of their loyalty. Azima sent a personal message swearing to defend that place as if it were a little corner of Cuba; it was not necessary to replace him.

Siki had left early in the morning. He had not delivered his entire report or rested from his tiring trip when a messenger arrived with the following letter from Mbili; the first part noted the time as 9:00 [a.m.].

> Tatu:
>
> The Congolese who stayed refuse to dig trenches, and the man I consider their leader proposes to go off and attack the guardsmen, which he says is better than digging trenches. We sent Charles to explain to him that it was better to dig trenches; there was a sharp clash between Charles and the Congolese leader; they threw a few punches at each other and the Congolese leader picked up his rifle to kill Charles, so we took it away from him. He said Charles was on the Cubans' side, that the Cubans were bad and that Charles was the same, and that when the guardsmen came they were going to retreat and shoot at us. This is because one of the officers here is the man who told me at the ambush that the Cubans were no good.[1] I think he has continued with that line here; the attitude of the Congolese is one of open hostility and this is evident in their inactivity.

Important: 11:15 [a.m.]

Tatu:

All the Rwandans have left. I was told the news at 10:00. I sent Akika off to check and it was true, they had gone. We agreed on a plan yesterday, and today they've gone off without saying a word to me. I think they're heading for their own country because that is what they talked about doing previously. When we got the news, Mundandi's adjutant was with me and I told him. He was stunned, went away and didn't come back. As I see it, they have taken the weapons and said nothing. Yesterday they agreed to give me 10 extra men and a machine gun on a trolley. As the Congolese were gone and no one came, I sent someone to find Calixte to ask what was happening. But no one has seen him, and no one can tell me where he is.

This may be a case of treachery. I propose that we withdraw a little as planned, split into two groups, take up new positions and mine the road. We need reinforcements urgently. I'll take some precautionary measures in case we have been betrayed. The compañero hearing your reply should come by the new road.

Patria o Muerte! [Homeland or death!]

Note: The Congolese here have already heard the news and are leaving.

Within a few hours, planes strafed the positions Mbili previously occupied, but he had already withdrawn. This might have been a coincidence or it may have meant we had simply been betrayed. We began to look for men as reinforcements; we disarmed men who came fleeing toward the base and gave their weapons to others. This exchange did not promise a lot, but it was all we could do.

At each of the ambushes we had eight Cubans and roughly 10 Congolese. The new recruits, the students who had arrived from the Soviet Union, were told that they had to go to the front line. They declared that they could not go in dribs and drabs but must all go together. After the

appropriate rebukes and threats (either you go or you must leave), a few were willing to go to the front line.

"Tremendo Punto" arrived in the evening with a compañero whose name I unfortunately don't remember and I did not note down; he seemed intelligent and willing to act, except that he had no experience. We talked about a lot of things, but fundamentally we discussed my statement: "We are facing a situation of total collapse and have two options: we either put up an elastic defense, give ground and retreat to another place, or mount a fixed defense and fight to the extent of our strength. What we cannot do is to wait with our arms folded for the guardsmen to advance and take a new position from us without a fight; that would lead to the desertion of more men." Such a tactic (or lack of tactics) would result in the loss of everything and total disorganization. Compañero "Tremendo Punto" asked to speak and said that, if these were the two choices, he would immediately opt for a fixed defense. The Cubans with me looked as though they would kill him or eat him alive; it was very painful for me. Given our location and the circumstances, a fixed defense seemed the best option, but a fixed defense with whom? The Congolese and the Rwandans were gone. Could I ask the Cubans to die in their trenches to defend this piece of nothing? More importantly, if they did this, would it produce any result? The fact was that I had raised the fixed defense as a pedagogic alternative; the only thing to be done was to "leave a mark."

In spite of the inclement weather, "Tremendo Punto" went down that same night to talk with Massengo, and I did the same the next day. Those who participated in this discussion were: "Tremendo Punto," the compañero whose name I don't remember, Compañero Kent from Kenya (who had joined the Liberation Army), Charles Bemba (who had come to discuss his concerns), and perhaps someone else. There was some deliberation on the military options. A fixed defense was excluded because I eventually admitted that there were too few people—only ours—and we could not have complete confidence in them. A retreat to Fizi was also excluded because of the conditions prevailing there. That left two possible places of refuge: one was Uvira, which had to be reached via the lake (a dangerous route) or on foot, first crossing enemy lines and then passing through Fizi territory on a very long and difficult march; the second area was to the south, where a few villages such as Bondo offered the possibility of

organizing a defense. It was decided that Aly and Moja would go to scout around Bondo quickly and make the decision on the same day. Aly argued this was necessary because of “Tremendo Punto’s” unreliability as in his view it was a bad position. I had a little altercation with Aly, who grumbled about how he’d had enough of running around the hills without the cooperation of the local people; I replied sharply that we would organize the evacuation from Bondo and that he could leave with the group that gave up the struggle. He shot back that he would stay with me to the end but, so as not to lose the argument, he added, “running around the hills for 20 years.”

I thought the time had come to inform Compañero Massengo of Tanzania’s decision because I didn’t think it proper to keep it secret any longer. That government’s attitude was not honest; one might consider that it had behaved correctly toward us, but there was a revolutionary way of doing things that they did not respect. I told Massengo that a few days earlier I had received a cable communicating that government’s decision, but I had tried to stop this information leaking out, even to Cubans, because of the current situation; I was now telling him only so that he could draw his own conclusions. He apparently discussed it immediately with the compañeros because “Tremendo Punto” showed up as night was falling and informed me that Massengo had come to me to propose the abandonment of the struggle but that, as I had spoken to him about evacuating to a different place and a whole series of tasks that we had before us, he couldn’t bring himself to talk to me; all the compañeros in charge were in agreement to cease the struggle for now.

I answered that this was a very serious decision. There were men still organized at the fronts at Fizi and Mukundi, as well as the ones at Uvira, and there was also Mulele’s front. The moment we left, enemy troops would be free to attack those groups; our flight would hasten their dispersal because we knew that they were not strong enough to resist. I asked him to give me a letter in which Massengo set out this decision. “Tremendo Punto” looked surprised and a little aggrieved, but I insisted, saying that there was something called history, which is composed of many fragmented facts and which can be distorted. In short, I wanted to have that letter in my possession in case our actions were ever misinterpreted; in support of my argument, I reminded him of recent slanders against us. He replied that it was a tough thing to demand and he didn’t know whether Massengo would

accept. It was clear to me that if Massengo did not agree to give me the letter, he must think he was doing something wrong. But I told him the responsibility for the retreat could never be ours.

The conversation remained inconclusive because “Tremendo Punto” went off to confer with his compañeros. At that point, a call came through from the Upper Base; the guardsmen had advanced and Azima had withdrawn without a fight; there had been many guardsmen and they had come in three columns. They were attacked during the retreat without suffering any losses, but the lookout apparently took refuge from the air attack that preceded the advance and did not see the guardsmen coming; there was little hope for him; Suleiman was his name. The other lookout, a Congolese, also disappeared.

I went immediately to inform Massengo of this and proposed the organization of an immediate retreat; this was accepted. “Tremendo Punto” spoke up to say that they had talked things over and that we should carry out a definitive withdrawal. The chief of the military police was there listening to the conversation. Five minutes later, all the telephone operators and all the military policemen had fled; the base fell into total chaos.

I suggested to Massengo that he should deal with his men and that I would organize the retreat at every point where the Cubans were present. This was done. I gave orders that all the equipment, including the transmitter, should be stored in those places that had been prepared in advance, and that they leave that very night, setting on fire everything that remained, and that the ammunition and heavy weapons should be hidden; I would wait for them down below. It was necessary to carry the portable transmitter with which we had already made contact with Kigoma from the Upper Base; at least we received and got through well, despite the fact that the equipment was designed for 20 kilometers rather than the 70 or so to the Tanzanian port.

In the meantime, a number of telegrams explaining the situation had been sent by radio. On November 18, a message said:

> Rafael:
>
> The situation is collapsing; entire units and peasants are going over to the enemy. None of the Congolese troops can be relied on. After

> today we may not be able to go on the air with the main apparatus. We will maintain contact with Kigoma by auxiliary apparatus. Changa here because of mechanical difficulties. Crew and boats in good condition urgently needed.

Nevertheless, Changa had finally been able to get across, with a huge load of women and children, which caused a row with the Kigoma commissioner; he said that we were only bringing him idlers and parasites, and that we should take them back to where they came from. Of course, we did not do that.

On the same day, Rafael sent me the following telegram.

> Tatu:
>
> Second conversation with Kawawa in which we forcefully presented the situation to him and asked for immediate supply of materials; he promised to resolve this before leaving for Korea. On the road to Kigoma we saw a truck with very few things for over there. We spoke with Cambona yesterday; he promised to look into it and give us reply today from conversation with the president. It was a direct and definitive discussion that made them responsible for consequences. We spoke with Soviets and Chinese and informed them of the absurd situation with delivery of material they have sent. We propose telling ambassadors of UAR [United Arab Republic], Ghana and Mali that under Accra agreement Tanzania is not delivering material to nationalists resisting white mercenaries and that responsibility for annihilation will lie with African leaders and Tanzanian government. In coordination with ourselves Kabila meeting government figures to make the same points, the same with the Chinese and the Soviets.

I sent him the following reply.

> Rafael:

> We want to know result of last report to Cuba about commission to discuss with Tanzanian government. On subject to discuss with governments of Ghana, Mali and UAR, put it in form of question: what was actual agreement, and was it to leave us in present situation? We think measures you are taking will come too late. That will take around a month, which we don't have. We intend to evacuate this place and then evacuate most Cubans in second stage. A small group of us will remain as symbol of Cuba's dignity. Inform Cuba.

My intention was to send back the sick, the frail and everyone "weak in the legs" and to fight on with a small group of men. With this in mind, I carried out a little "decisive test" among the compañeros that yielded discouraging results; if left to them, almost no one was disposed to keep on fighting.

One of the problems of the evacuation was that Maffu had sent a couple of his men to reconnoiter Kazima and they had not yet returned. It was decided that another compañero would go to find them and return as quickly as possible.

They should leave behind hidden the heavy weapons that they could not transport and move off with the rest; some compañeros such as Mbili and his group would have to complete a very long march if we wanted to abandon the lower base by dawn. Basing my reasoning on the nature of the enemy attacks, I calculated that they would give us a day's respite before trying other maneuvers; this would allow us to leave quite easily, but we had to take steps to avoid contact and to save most of the gear.

Our three sick men, along with Ngenje, the man in charge of the base, left by boat for a little village called Mukungo where we were thinking of organizing resistance; they took with them some of the heavy weapons from Azi's unit, but not all the weapons because the Congolese element in our own forces had also been affected by dissolution and a lot of stuff had been scattered around. The Congolese were now heading for the Fizi area. At first I planned to stop them but, on second thoughts, I ordered anyone who wanted to leave to be allowed to do so because, if it came to an evacuation, we would not be able to take everyone with us.

Before dawn we set fire to the house that had served as our accommodation for nearly seven months; there was a lot of paper, many documents we might have forgotten and left there, so it was best to destroy everything at once. Shortly, when it was already daylight, they began to burn the ammunition dumps without consultation; neither Massengo nor I had given any such order and, in fact, I had tried to persuade the Congolese that it was important to take the materiel with them, if not to the new base then at least to the nearby mountain. Instead, someone set fire to quite a lot of materiel. As the valuable store burned and exploded, I watched the fireworks from the first hill on the way to Jungo and waited for the many stragglers to catch up. They came along wearily, with an alarming lack of vitality, dropping parts of heavy weapons to lighten their load without a thought for what the weapon might mean in a battle. Virtually no Congolese remained in the units and the Cubans carried everything; I stressed the need to look after those weapons, which would be crucial if we had to endure a final attack, so the men set off dragging their feet and making frequent stops, bearing one cannon and one machine gun, having already left two others along the way.

I was waiting for the communications unit; we were supposed to attempt the first contact at 06:00 and I watched the head of the team, Tuma, coming down the hill opposite me from the Upper Base to the Lake Base. It was infuriating as the compañeros were taking three hours on a hill that should normally take 10 minutes to climb down, and then they had to take a break before continuing. I ordered them to leave anything superfluous and to try to walk faster; but among the superfluous things, the telegraph operator forgot the code and someone had to be sent back to retrieve it. I spoke harshly to the operators, trying to make them see their importance for communications and urging them to make an extra effort to reach the rendezvous point. We tried to make contact as usual at 10:00 and failed. We kept moving at the slow pace dictated by the three compañeros, who were completely unused to hiking through hills and marched only in spirit.

We made little progress; a normal march should take three or four hours from Kibamba (where our base was located) to Jungo. But at 3:00 in the afternoon, when we were scheduled to make our second contact with Kigoma, we were still quite a long way from the rendezvous point. At that

time we managed to send the following message, which was successfully received:

> Changa:
>
> We have lost the base, we are proceeding with emergency equipment, reply urgently whether you can come tonight.

Then a second message:

> Changa:
>
> Today the enemy is not yet at the lakeshore, our position is Jungo, some 10 kilometers south of Kibamba. Massengo decided to abandon the struggle and the best thing for us is to leave as soon as possible.

When the compañeros present heard the “understood” from the lake, all their faces were transformed as if they had been touched by a magic wand.

Our final message was to ask whether Changa had arrived. The messages were coded and it was necessary to decode them and to encode the reply. The response seemed to be: “No one has arrived here.” Then they said they were having difficulties with the apparatus and went off the air.

The pre-coded message meant that the expected crew had not arrived, but it answered our question. Apparently Changa had had difficulties on the lake (enemy aircraft were flying over it that day) which would imply that the boats had been lost and we could not get away; the faces again clouded over with exhaustion and anxiety. At 7:00 [p.m.] we made another attempt at contact and failed; conditions at the lake meant that our little apparatus could only transmit properly at 3:00 in the afternoon.

We reached Jungo in time to sleep; everything was chaotic there, and not even food had been prepared. When we did a roll call, four men were missing: the lookout, who had been lost during the guardsmen’s advance; the two who had been reconnoitering at Kazima; and a fourth who had come in one of the groups from the Upper Base and inexplicably disappeared. A compañero had been sent to look for the men at Kazima, but

he had returned without locating them. Desperate not to be left behind, he had only had a quick look around and came back. I guessed this by calculating the time he took but I said nothing to him because there was nothing to be done about it. We organized a unit under Rebokate's command to take the road coming through the mountains from Nganja, so that we would have a commanding view of the two spots where the guardsmen might appear: the heights and the lakeside. As the men were heading off on this task, we heard an explosion at the top of the hill over which the road passed. As the ground was mined, we thought it was guardsmen advancing and that we would have no time to organize a defense on the heights. We occupied some hillsides, putting together a limited defense, and continued on toward Sele, a village quite close to Jungo.

The attempts to make contact at 06:00 and 10:00 on November 20 were also unsuccessful. The telegraph operator walked so slowly that we only reached Sele at midday, whereas that stretch should have been done in no more than an hour. Most of the men were gathered at Sele and we ate something to ease our hunger. Banhir, the man who had been left behind on the march, turned up at dusk. He had sprained his ankle and asked a compañero to let the others know so that they would go and find his backpack. While waiting, he stayed where he was but the other man didn't do what he had been asked, or did it badly, and by morning he was still where he had suffered the accident completely alone. He was at the base until 9:00 in the morning on [November] 20 and then left, believing that he had lost contact with us. The guardsmen had not entered the base; all the roads were deserted and all the houses abandoned.

At 14:30 we made contact with Kigoma. Our message read:

> Changa:
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> Total men to evacuate less than 200, it will be more difficult each day that passes. We are at Sele, 10 or 15 kilometers south of Kibamba.

I received the anticipated reply:

> Tatu:
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> The crossing is set for tonight. Yesterday the commissioner did not let us cross.

The men were euphoric. I spoke with Massengo and suggested leaving from that very point at night. As there were a lot of Congolese, the General Staff held a meeting at which it was decided that Jean Paulis would remain in the Congo with his men and we and various leaders would evacuate; the troops who were originally from that area would remain. They would not be told of our intention to withdraw but would be sent on various pretexts to the nearby village. One of the little boats we still had to ply between various points on the lake arrived and took a large number of the Congolese, but those who were part of our force smelled a rat and wanted to stay. I ordered a selection to be made of those who had conducted themselves well up to that point, so that they would be taken across as Cubans. Massengo gave his authorization for it to be done as I saw fit.

For me the situation was decisive. Two men whom we had sent on a mission and had comprehensively and correctly fulfilled it would now be left behind unless they made their way back within a few hours.[2] The full weight of the slander, both inside and outside the Congo, would fall on us as soon as we left. My troop was a mixed bunch, and my investigations suggested that I could extract up to 20 to follow me, this time with knitted brows. But then what? All the leaders were pulling out, the peasants were displaying ever greater hostility toward us. But I was deeply pained at the thought of simply departing as we had come, leaving behind defenseless peasants and men who were armed but defenseless, given their low capacity for fighting. To leave them defeated and feeling betrayed wounded me deeply.

To have remained in the Congo was not a sacrifice for me—not for a year, or even for the five years with which I had terrified my men. It was part of a concept of struggle that had fully taken shape in my brain. I could reasonably expect six or eight men to accompany me without furrowed brows. But the rest would view it as their duty, either toward me personally, or as a moral duty to the revolution; I would dispense with those who could not muster any enthusiasm to fight. Not long before, I had been able to

sense this right here, when I interrupted a conversation and they turned to me, asking in a jocular vein about some of the Congolese leaders. I replied sharply that they should first ask themselves what our own attitude had been, whether we could say with hand on heart that it had been what it should have been; I didn't believe so. An awkward, hostile silence descended.

In reality, the thought of staying in the Congo continued to haunt me throughout the night, and maybe I never did make a decision, but instead became one more fugitive.

The way in which the Congolese compañeros would view the evacuation seemed to me to be degrading; our withdrawal was a mere flight, and worse—we were complicit in the deception of those people being left behind on the ground. Moreover, who was I now? I had the feeling that, after my farewell letter to Fidel, the compañeros began to see me as a man from other climes, somewhat removed from Cuba's specific problems, and I could not bring myself to demand of them the final sacrifice of staying. I spent the final hour like this, alone and perplexed, until the boats eventually arrived at 2:00 in the morning, with a Cuban crew that had arrived that afternoon and immediately had to cast off that very night. There were too many people for the boats at that late hour. I set 3:00 a.m. as the latest possible time for departure as it would be daylight at 5:30 when we would be in the middle of the lake. Work got under way on organizing the evacuation. The sick went aboard, then Massengo's entire General Staff (some 40 men chosen by himself) and finally all the Cubans. It was a sad, inglorious spectacle; I had to refuse men who kept imploring us to take them too; there was not a hint of greatness in this retreat, no gesture of defiance. The machine guns were in position, and I kept the men on alert, as usual, in case there was an attempt to intimidate us by attacking from the land. But nothing like that happened. There was just a lot of grumbling, while the leader of those who were fleeing cursed in time with the beat of the loose moorings.

I would like to record here the names of the compañeros on whom I always felt I could rely, by virtue of their personal qualities, their belief in the revolution, and their determination to do their duty come what may. Some of them flagged at the last minute, but that final minute does not count because it was a weakening of their belief, not of their readiness to

sacrifice themselves. There were certainly more compañeros in this category, but I was not close to them and so I cannot vouch for them. It is an incomplete, personal list, very much influenced by subjective factors, so may those who are not on it please forgive me and believe that they belong in the same category: Moja, Mbili, Pombo, Azi, Maffu, Tumaini, Ishirini, Tisa, Alau, Waziri, Agano, Hukumu, Ami, Amia, Singida, Arasili, Almari, Ananane, Angalia, Badala, Anara,[3] Mustafa, the doctors Kumi, Fizi, Morogoro and Kusulu, and the ineffable "Admiral" Changa, lord and master of the lake. Siki and Tembo deserve a special mention. I often disagreed with them, sometimes violently, about our assessment of the situation, but they always offered me their guileless devotion. And a final word for Aly, a fine soldier and bad politician.[4]

We crossed the lake without any problems, despite the slowness of the boats, and reached Kigoma in daylight in the company of the cargo ship that was making the crossing from Albertville to this port.

A mooring rope seemed to have broken, and the exultation of the Cubans and the Congolese rose like boiling liquid overflowing the little container of the boats, affecting but not infecting me. During those last hours of our time in the Congo, I felt alone, in a way that I had never felt in Cuba nor in any of my wanderings around the globe. I might say: "Never have I felt myself so alone as I do today returning from all my travels."

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1. **Che's note:** This officer had put the same arguments to his men at the time of the Katenga ambush.

2. **Che's note:** They were rescued a month later by a group of volunteers consisting of Ishirini, Achali, Aja, Arasili and Adabu, under Siki's command, and with the cooperation of Changa and the group of sailors who had arrived at the last minute. **[Editor's note:** Another version of the list says the rescue group was composed of Siki, Ishirini, Abdallah, Achali, Alau and Wasiri. At the time when most of the force left, four combatants remained in the Congo: Awirino, Nyenyea, Chapua and Suleman. The last three were rescued by the group that remained in Kigoma; Awirino remained definitively disappeared.]

3. It has not been possible to identify the real name of this combatant. It may be a typographical error in the original.

4. Here troop Che offers a general evaluation of some of the combatants of the Congolese guerrilla force which, while recognizing its limitations, expands upon his comments and observations

throughout the text, as the reader will already have discovered. At various points, Che also evaluates his own performance in his typically self-critical style. See especially, his epilogue to this text.

EPILOGUE

It only remains in an epilogue to draw some conclusions about the scenario of the war, how various factors played out and what I see as the future of the Congolese revolution.

I will focus, in particular, on the area that was the eastern front, the area with which I am personally familiar, and not generalize from my experience in a country with such diverse features as those of the Congo.

The geographical setting in which we found ourselves is characterized by the great depression filled by Lake Tanganyika, some 35,000 square kilometers with an average width of approximately 50 kilometers. It is the lake that separates Tanzania and Burundi from the territory of the Congo. There is a range of mountains on either side of the depression: one belonging to Tanzania-Burundi, the other to the Congo. The second of these, which has an average height of some 1,500 meters above sea level (the lake is at 700 meters), stretches from the environs of Albertville in the south, through the whole scene of the war to the region beyond Bukavu in the north, where it descends in hills into the tropical forest. The width of the system varies, but it is estimated to be an average of roughly 20 to 30 kilometers. There are also two higher mountain chains, steep and wooded, one to the east and the other to the west, with an undulating plain between them with valleys that are suitable for agriculture and for raising livestock. (The latter is mainly practiced by herdsmen from the Rwandan tribes, who have traditionally raised cattle.) To the west, the mountains fall sharply down to a plain some 700 meters above sea level, which forms part of the basin of the Congo River, a savannah with tropical trees, grasses and some natural pastures that break up the woodlands. The woods near the mountains are not particularly dense, but moving westward to the Kabambare region, they become thoroughly tropical and thick.

The mountains rise from the lake and give the terrain a very rugged aspect. There are little flat areas where invading troops can land and camp but these are very difficult to defend if the adjoining heights have not been secured. The roads to the south end at Kabimba, where we had one of our positions; the road to the west skirts the mountains on its way from Albertville to Lulimba-Fizi, and from there one branch continues to Bukavu via Mwenga, while the other passes along the shores of the lake to Baraka and, finally, Uvira. After Lulimba, the road climbs into the mountains; this is a good setting for ambushes, and so too—though to a lesser degree—is the part that crosses the plain of the Congo Basin.

From October to May rain is a frequent, daily occurrence and almost nonexistent from June to September, although there are some isolated showers toward the end of the latter month. It rains all the time in the mountains, but less often in the dry months. The plain abounds with game (a type of deer); in the mountains you can hunt buffalo (not very many), elephants and monkeys (which are very common). Monkey flesh is edible and has a fairly pleasant taste; elephant meat is tough and rubbery, but goes down easily enough when seasoned by hunger. The basic food crops are cassava and corn, while oil is extracted from palm trees. There are lots of goats, and the peasants have poultry, and there are pigs in a few places. With some difficulty, guerrillas without an operational base can feed themselves in the region.

There is a wider variety of crops to the north of Baraka-Fizi, and a sugar mill a little north of Uvira. Plenty of rice and peanuts are grown in the Kabambare-Kasengo area. There used to be cotton, but by the time we were there it had virtually disappeared; I don’t know how this crop would have been managed in an agricultural context, but it used to be exploited on a capitalist basis, with modern cotton gins installed by foreign corporations at strategic centers.

The lake is full of fish, but there has been little fishing in recent times because of aircraft during the day and raids by the dictatorship’s boats at night.

For the purpose of analyzing the revolutionary forces in this conflict, the human geography can be divided into three groups: peasants, leaders and soldiers.

The peasants belong to different tribes, of which there are a great many in the area. If we look at the enemy army's report on its general plan of attack we notice that it always specifies the tribe to which people belong; this is important information for political work. Relations between the tribes are usually cordial but never truly fraternal, and there is serious rivalry between some of the tribal groups. This phenomenon can be seen between the Rwandans and the rest of the Congolese tribes, but it is also clearly evident between tribes in the Nor-Katanga ethnic area (who inhabited the southern part of our guerrilla territory) and tribes of the ethnic area of Kivu province (who inhabited the northern part of our territory); this was most conspicuously represented by Kabila on one side and Soumialot on the other.

The peasants present us with one of the most difficult and engaging problems of a people's war. In all wars of liberation like this, a fundamental element is the hunger for land arising from the great impoverishment of a peasantry exploited by the latifundists, feudal lords and, in some cases, capitalist-type companies. In the Congo, however, this was not the case, at least not in our region, and probably not in most of the country. The Congo has only 14 million inhabitants spread over more than two million square kilometers—a very low population density—with land that is highly fertile. On the eastern front, there is no significant land hunger or even individual enclosures; simple convention ensures that the crop belongs to those who cultivate it. Moreover, in practice, property is not defended against intruders; only where there are gardens is there some protection against goats and other animals that might cause damage. The concept of land ownership hardly exists in any of the areas we visited, and the huge expanse of the Congo Basin permits anyone who wishes to acquire land to simply go and work there. As far as I understand it, in the area around Bukavu to the north, feudalism is much more developed and there are real feudal lords and serfs; but in the mountainous region where we were the peasants are completely independent.

How can the level of development of these tribes be described? It would be necessary to conduct a much deeper study than we have had the opportunity to make, with much more data and with a proper geographical breakdown, for it is clear that the development of each sub-region very much depends on its particular historical and social conditions. There are

features of primitive communism among the nomadic groups, and some traces of slavery in the way women are treated, although in relation to men no slavery was evident. Women are merchandise, an object to be bought and sold, and there is no law or convention restricting the number of women that may be owned; economic influence is the only limiting factor. Once a woman is bought, she becomes the absolute property of her lord and husband, who in general does not work at all, or only very little, in the house or fields. At most he participates in activities like hunting, but always accompanied by women, who play an active role. It is women's responsibility to till the land, to transport crops, to prepare food, and to look after the children; she is truly a domestic animal. Feudalism, as I've said, can be seen in northern parts of the region, but not here, where there is no property in land. Capitalism is not dominant but operates in superficial forms through small traders who establish themselves on the periphery, and following the North Americans in what we might call the "demonstration effect" of certain items used by the peasantry. Aluminum pots are fast replacing earthenware ones, for example, and industrially made spears are taking over from those made at home or at the local forge; modern clothing is worn by some peasants, and radios can be found in the homes of the more prosperous. Industrial goods are acquired through trading the products of agriculture and hunting.

In the past, people worked as paid laborers, or simply through middlemen, in the extraction of gold from the rivers that flow down from the mountains to the Congo Basin. The trenches dug for this purpose can still be seen, but the works have been abandoned. Some crops, such as cotton, are processed and packed on a capitalist basis with the help of modern machinery. Textile factories are not present in the region, although there are a few in Albertville; there are no industrial workers, except those at the sugar mill, whose status is unclear, and I saw no signs of wage labor. The peasants gave their labor to the army and for the rest of the time supported themselves through hunting, fishing or agriculture; any surplus was sold for money. The Congolese currency is accepted as a measure of value, but it does not penetrate very deeply into the relations of production.

Imperialism shows itself only sporadically in the region, its main interest in the Congo being the strategic mineral resources of Katanga, where there is an industrial proletariat, the diamond resources of Katanga

and Kasai, and the tin deposits located near our region (although not actually in our region). Agriculture consists of the cultivation of cotton and peanuts, and to some extent palm trees for the extraction of oil, but in these cases, too, the harvesting and trade are carried out on the basis of primitive relations.

What could the Liberation Army offer this peasantry? This is the question that always bothered us. We could not speak here of an agrarian reform, of dividing up the land, because everyone could see that it was already divided; nor could we speak of credits for the purchase of farm tools because the peasants ate what they grew with their primitive instruments and the physical features of the region did not lend themselves to credit-fuelled expansion. Ways have to be found of fostering the need to acquire industrial goods, which the peasants were obviously willing to accept and pay for, and therefore a need for more widespread trade. In the conditions of the war, however, we could not pay any real attention to this.

We should stress here the exploitation to which the peasants are subjected. How is this manifest? What is visible is the mistreatment of the population; in the enemy-occupied areas, there is an increasing number of rapes of women and murders of men, women and children are multiplied. Moreover, the people are forced to supply food and perform services. The key feature here is the negation of the individual human being, which may go as far as physical elimination because the [dictatorship's] army, as a modern institution, had organized their logistics, anticipating a shortage of supplies or the hostility of the population.

On the other hand, what did we have to offer? We did not offer much protection, as our story has shown. Nor did we offer any education, which might have been a great vehicle for communication. Medical services were provided only by the few Cubans present, with inadequate medical supplies, a fairly primitive system of administration, and no sanitary conditions. I think that some deep thought and research should be devoted to the problem of revolutionary tactics where the relations of production do not give rise to land hunger among the peasantry. The peasantry is the main social layer in this region; there is no industrial proletariat and a petty bourgeois class of middlemen is not very developed.

What kind of leaders has the revolution brought forth? We may divide them into the categories of national and local leaders. The national leaders I

got to know were first and foremost Kabila and Massengo. Kabila is certainly the only one of them who, in addition to a clear head and a developed capacity for reasoning, has the personality of a leader: he asserts himself by his very presence; he is capable of inspiring loyalty, or at least submission; and he is skillful in direct dealings with the population (although this contact is very rare). In short, he is a leader capable of mobilizing the masses. Massengo is an individual with very little charisma, no knowledge of the art of war and no talent for organization; he was totally overwhelmed by events. His distinctive feature was an extraordinary loyalty to Kabila, and a desire to continue the fight beyond what had been planned, even against the views of many of those around him. It would be unfair to expect any more of him; he did what he was capable of doing.

Among all the section heads on the General Staff and the so-called brigade leaders, not one can be described as having the qualities of a national leader. The only one who might develop in the future is Compañero Muyumba, but he is still in the Congo and we don't know what his situation is. He is a serious young man, apparently intelligent and resolute insofar as we were able to observe him, but that is all we can say about him.

Of the national leaders in the Congo, Mulele remains the big mystery, almost a phantom. He was never seen at meetings, nor did he ever leave his zone after the struggle began. There are many indications that he is a man of a superior caliber, but his envoys—or those who said they were his envoys—displayed all the negative qualities of their counterparts in the various commissions and sectors of the liberation movement who roam the world swindling the revolution.

Of the men who have gained some prestige in recent times, we have already related what others have to say about General Olenga. Without judging whether they are true or not, we can say that the stories about him suggest his unwillingness to make any sacrifice. For months that are becoming years, he has been living off the myth of the revolution as a general in exile. Others do this as political leaders, but he is a general who conducts his operations by telepathy from Cairo or other such capital cities.

Soumialot is another whom I consider useful as a middle-level revolutionary leader. With the right guidance and supervision, he might have rendered some service as president of the Supreme Council of the

Revolution; the main things he does are traveling, living it up and giving sensational press conferences—that's all. He lacks any organizational ability. His conflicts with Kabila, in which both employed a multitude of ruses, contributed as much as anything to the temporary setback of the insurrection.

Gbenyé is not worth mentioning as he is simply an agent of the counterrevolution.

It might be the case that some young people have emerged, combining a capacity for leadership with a revolutionary spirit, but I have not met any or they have not demonstrated those qualities to date.

The local leaders fall into two categories: those in charge of military units and peasant leaders. The military leaders were appointed through the most arbitrary methods, with no theoretical, intellectual, military or organizational training of any kind. Their only merit is that they exercise some influence over the tribes in their regions, but a line could be drawn through their names without any loss to the revolution.

The local peasant leaders are the *kapitas* and chairmen, appointed by the old Lumumba administration or its successors, who would like to be the germ of a civil power. But faced with tribal realities, the easy option was chosen of making traditional chiefs the chairmen and *kapitas.* These men are nothing other than the old chiefs in another guise, some better or more progressive than others, some more conscious of the meaning of the revolution, but none of them have reached even a middling level of political development. Having authority over a group of peasants, they are responsible for the provision of food to soldiers passing through the area and bearers to carry things from one place to another, for the organization of supplies to units installed nearby, for help with the construction of housing, etc. They were useful intermediaries in the solving of such problems, but did nothing faintly related to political work.

The troop had their political commissar, a title borrowed from the socialist versions of a liberation army or people's army. Anyone familiar with the work of commissars in various liberation wars, or who knows of the heroism and self-sacrifice of such compañeros from stories about them, would not be able to recognize them in the Congo, where the political commissar was selected from men with a certain level of education—almost always with a knowledge of French—who came from an urban

petty-bourgeois family. They performed like sporadic loudspeakers; the men would assemble at a certain time to hear the commissar “sound off” on particular problems, and then they were left to their own initiative to follow his verbal recommendations. Neither the commissars nor the officers, with a few honorable exceptions, participated directly in combat; they looked out for their own skins, had better food and clothing than the rest of the troop, and enjoyed frequent vacations when they could go and get drunk on the notorious *pombe* in nearby villages. In the Congo, the political commissar is a veritable dandy of the revolution and, furthermore, could be dispensed with without any harm whatsoever, although it would be far preferable to develop genuine revolutionaries for this task which is so vitally important in a people’s army.[1]

The soldiers are of peasant origin and completely raw; the main attraction for them is to have a rifle and a uniform, sometimes even shoes and a certain authority in the area. Corrupted by inactivity and the habit of lording it over the peasants, saturated with fetishistic notions about death and the enemy, with no structured political education, they consequently lack revolutionary consciousness or any forward-looking perspective beyond the traditional horizon of their tribal territory. Lazy and undisciplined, they have no spirit of combat or self-sacrifice; they do not trust their leaders (who can be considered exemplary only in terms of obtaining women, *pombe* or food, and making an easy life for themselves); they lack any consistent battle experience that would enable them to develop, if only as killers; in reality, they lack training of any kind as drilling was the only exercise we ever saw them do during our stay there. All these traits make the soldier of the Congolese revolution the worst example of a fighter I have encountered to date.

Even with full backing of the leaders, it still would have been a gigantic task to make revolutionary soldiers out of these individuals. But given the hopelessness of the high command and the obstruction by the local chiefs, this became the most thankless of all our tasks and one in which we completely failed.

Among the political commissars and special weapons instructors there was often someone who had returned from a six-month course of study in one of the socialist countries. Most of these graduates came from Bulgaria,

the Soviet Union and China. You could not work wonders with such men; the prior selection was very poor, and it was like winning the lottery if you found genuine revolutionaries or at least men tested in struggle. They returned with a great sense of their own importance, a highly developed conception of the duty to protect cadre (ie, themselves), and a well-formed idea, clearly expressed in their actions and demands, that the revolution owed them a lot for their period of study abroad and should somehow reward them now that they were making the sacrifice of being with their compañeros. They almost never participated in any fighting; they were usually instructors—a task for which they were not qualified, with a few exceptions—or formed parallel political organizations that called themselves Marxist-Leninist but actually served to deepen divisions. In my view, most of these evils were due to flaws in the prior selection. Good education can result in extraordinary development for someone with an awakening consciousness. But for this kind of pliable and domesticated revolutionary, all that was developed during his months in a socialist country was an ambition to attain a leadership position on the basis of his colossal knowledge, and also, at the front, a nostalgia for the good times spent abroad.

We should ask what is left after our defeat. From a military point of view, the situation is not so bad. The small villages controlled by our army did fall, but in the surrounding area there are troops—with less ammunition and some lost weapons but generally intact. The enemy soldiers occupy only the territory through which they pass and this is a very important fact. Nevertheless, from a political point of view, all that remains are scattered groups that are still disintegrating, but from which one or several nuclei should be extracted as the basis for a future guerrilla army. As of today, forces are present in the Fizi-Baraka area but do not occupy any locality nor do they have permanent control over any territory; others remain more or less well organized at Uvira, controlling a good stretch of the highway from Baraka to Bukavu up to now; and at Mukundi, Muyumba has what could be the germ of an organization with a political understanding of the struggle. There are also some troops at Kabimba who used to be quite well armed, and there must still be some nuclei in the Kabambare and Kasengo hills, although we have not had contact with them for some time.

It is important to note that all these groups have very little to do with one another; in practice they don't obey any orders from above, and their vision does not extend beyond the zone where they have their own particular enclave. For all these reasons, they are not the embryo of a new army, but the remnants of the old. There may be somewhere between 4,000 and 5,000 weapons in the area, senselessly distributed among individual peasants, and it will not be easy to recover them. Some heavy weapons were saved, but right now I cannot say precisely how many. If a single leader with the right qualities were to emerge at just one spot, the eastern front would soon hold the same territory it had achieved at the time of the defeat. A rival to Soumialot and Kabila has recently appeared in the person of Mbagira, the minister for foreign relations in the Supreme Council of the Revolution, who has been based in Uvira, but we cannot make any concrete assessment of him. Only events will tell whether he really is a leader with the capabilities demanded by the struggle in the Congo.

What are the characteristics of the enemy? First, it should be explained that the old Congolese army that remained as a legacy from the Belgian colonial period—badly instructed and without a leadership cadre or fighting spirit—was swept away by the revolutionary wave; it was so badly demoralized that towns could be taken without a fight. (It seems to be true that the *simbas* would telephone in advance their intention to capture a particular city and the government troops would promptly withdraw.) Subsequently, the army was put in the hands of North American and Belgian instructors, who transformed it into a force with the characteristics of a regular army capable of fighting without assistance—although in the final stage of the war it received help from white mercenaries. It is well trained and disciplined, with proper cadres. The white mercenaries fight efficiently—as long as they do not have to take a pounding—and the Africans fight alongside them. They don't have much in the way of weapons; their most effective weapon turned out to have been their PT boats, which made it difficult [for us] to cross the lake; but their aircraft, which I have mentioned before, are antiquated and not very effective; their infantry weapons were only modernized at the very end.

In general, the Liberation Army had better infantry weapons than Tshombe's army—hard to imagine but true—and this was one of the

reasons why the patriotic forces did not bother to capture the weapons of those who fell in battle and maintained no interest in that source of supply.

The enemy's tactics were those common in this type of war: air cover for attacks by columns on population centers; protective aircraft patrols along the main roads; and in the final phase, when the demoralization of our army had become evident, a direct attack on mountain strongholds by columns advancing against and capturing our positions, although without a fight. This is an army that one has to hit hard in order to undermine its morale. Given the geographical conditions, this can be achieved easily by adopting the correct tactics.

It is also appropriate to analyze our own side. The great majority were blacks [Afro-Cubans]. This could have created empathy for and unity with the Congolese, but that did not happen. We didn't see that it made much difference to our relations whether we were black or white; the Congolese knew how to identify each man's personal traits, and only in my own case did I sometimes suspect that my being white influenced matters. The truth is that our own compañeros were poorly educated, as well as having a relatively low level of political development. As often happens in such cases, they arrived bursting with optimism and good intentions, thinking that they would march triumphantly through the Congo. At one meeting before hostilities commenced, some men remarked that Tatu was too remote from military matters, that his timid concerns about the relationship of forces would not stop them breaking in at one end and coming out at the other; then the country would be liberated and they could go back to Havana.

I always warned that the war would last three to five years, but no one believed this. They were all inclined to dream of a triumphal march, a departure with big speeches and great honors, then medals and back to Havana. The reality came as a shock: food was short, often consisting of plain cassava even without salt, or *bukali,* which is the same; there was not enough medicine and sometimes not enough clothing or shoes; my dream of a fusion between our experienced men with army discipline and the Congolese was never realized.

There was never the necessary integration, and this cannot be blamed on skin color. Some Cubans were so dark-skinned that they were

indistinguishable from their Congolese compañeros; yet I heard one of them say: “Send me two of those blacks over there,” meaning two Congolese.

Our men were foreigners, superior beings, and they made this clear all too often. Highly sensitive because of past insults at the hands of the colonialists, the Congolese felt it in the core of their being when a Cuban displayed any distain toward them. I could never manage to achieve an entirely fair distribution of the food, and although it must be said that Cubans more often than not carried the heaviest burdens, they would rather insensitively load up a Congolese whenever the opportunity presented itself. It is not easy to explain this contradiction, which involved various subjective factors and subtle nuances. But one simple fact might shed some light on the subject: namely, my inability to get the Cubans to use the term “Congolese.” They referred instead to “the Congos,” apparently a simpler and more intimate term, but it carried a hefty dose of venom. Language was another real barrier, as it was difficult for a force such as ours—submerged in the mass of Congolese—to function without having their language. From the beginning there were a few Cubans who lived happily alongside the Congolese and quickly learned to rattle things off in basic Swahili, a half-way language, but there were not many of these compañeros and there was always the risk of a misunderstanding that might sour relations or lead us into error.

I have tried to portray the collapse of our troop in the way it occurred. It was a gradual but not a steadily incremental process; it gathered explosive material and then erupted at times of defeat, culminating at moments such as the fiasco at Front de Force; the series of Congolese desertions at the Katenga ambushes, where the men were seriously ill; my personal disaster in the cortege carrying the wounded man, when we got very little help from the Congolese; and the desertion of our allies in the final stages. Each of these moments signaled a deepening of the demoralization and discouragement among our troop.

By the end, it was infected by the spirit of the lake. The men dreamed of returning home and, generally speaking, showed themselves incapable of sacrificing their lives in order to save the group or so that the revolution could march on united. Everyone just wanted to get across to the other shore to be safe. Discipline broke down to such an extent that a number of

really grotesque episodes took place, which would merit very severe penalties against some combatants.

If we made what we might call an impartial analysis, we would find that there was considerable justification for the collapse of the Cubans' morale, extraordinarily so, yet many compañeros maintained until the end, if not their spirit, then their discipline and a sense of responsibility. If I have focused more on the weaknesses, it is because I think that the most important aspect of our experience is an analysis of the collapse. This occurred under the impact of a concatenation of adverse events. The problem lies in the fact that the difficulties we faced will be hard to avoid early on in the next phases of the struggle in Africa because they are characteristic of countries with a very low level of development. One of our compañeros said in a joking tone that all the anti-conditions for revolution are present in the Congo; there is some truth in this caricature if one looks through the lens of a mature, crystallized revolution, but the magma from which the artisan must draw out the revolutionary spirit had basic features very similar to those of the Sierra Maestra peasantry in the early stages of the Cuban revolution.

We need to confirm what characteristics are required of a militant, so that he can overcome the violent traumas of a reality which he must confront. I think that candidates should first pass through a very rigorous process of selection, as well as one that opens their eyes. As I have said before, no one believed my statement that the revolution would require three to five years to achieve success; when reality confirmed this, they suffered an internal collapse, the collapse of a dream. Revolutionary militants who go off to participate in a similar experience must begin without dreams, having abandoned everything that used to constitute their lives and exertions. The only ones who should go are those with a revolutionary strength of mind much greater than the average—even the average in a revolutionary country—with practical experience gained in struggle, with a high level of political development, and with solid discipline. The incorporation process should be gradual and built around a small but tempered group, so that the selection of new combatants can proceed directly and anyone who does not meet the requirements can be removed. Therefore, a cadre policy should be followed. This will allow a steady increase in numbers without weakening the nucleus, and even the

formation of new cadres from the donor country in the insurrectional zone of the host country. We are not simply school teachers but also attend new revolutionary schools.

Another difficulty we experienced, and to which very special attention should be paid in the future, is that of the support base. Relatively large sums of money vanished into insatiable jaws, while minute quantities of food and equipment reached the troops in the field. The first requirement is for a command with undisputed and absolute authority in the zone of operations, able to exert rigorous control over the support base without relying on the control mechanisms of the higher centers of the revolution. The selection of men to carry out this task should be made well in advance. It has to be seen what a packet of cigarettes means for someone doing nothing at an ambush for 24 hours, and it has to be seen how little the hundred packets of cigarettes that might be smoked each day really cost in comparison with things that are either unnecessary or uselessly squandered in the course of the operation.

It is now time for me to make the most difficult analysis of all—that concerning my own role. Taking self-criticism as far as I can, I have come to the following conclusions: From the point of view of relations with the revolutionary command, I found myself impeded by the somewhat abnormal way in which I entered the Congo, and I was not able to overcome this problem. My reaction to things was inconsistent; for much of the time my attitude might have been described as excessively complacent, but I sometimes had very bitter and damaging outbursts, perhaps due to some innate aspect of my character; the only group with which I maintained unfailingly correct relations was the peasantry because I am more accustomed to political language, direct explanation and the force of example, and I think that I would have been successful in this field. I didn’t learn Swahili quickly or well enough—a defect attributable primarily to my knowledge of French, which allowed me to communicate with the leaders but alienated me from the rank-and-file. I lacked the will to make the effort required.

With regard to my relations with the men, I think I sacrificed myself sufficiently so that no one could hold anything against me personally or physically, but my two basic weaknesses were satisfied in the Congo: tobacco, which was rarely lacking, and reading material, which was always

abundant.[2] The inconvenience of having a pair of worn-out shoes or a dirty change of clothing, or of eating the same meager fare as the men and living in the same conditions was not a sacrifice for me. But my withdrawal to read, thereby escaping everyday problems, did tend to separate me from the men—not to speak of certain character traits that make it difficult for me to get close to people. I was hard, but I don't think excessively so. Nor was I unjust: I used methods that are not current in a regular army, such as denying a man the right to eat, the only effective method I know of in a guerrilla war. At first I tried moral coercion, but this failed. I tried to ensure that my men had the same view of the situation as myself, but I failed. They were not prepared to look optimistically at a future that had to be glimpsed through the dark fog of the present.

When the decisive moment came, I could not bring myself to demand the ultimate sacrifice [of others]; this was an internal, psychological obstacle. It was very easy for me to remain in the Congo. From the point of view of a combatant's vanity, it was the appropriate thing to do; from the point of view of my future activity, even if it wasn't the best, it made no difference at the present time. When I weighed the decision, I was swayed by the realization that it would be so easy to make the decisive sacrifice. I think I should have overcome this pointless burden of self-criticism and imposed the carrying out of the final gesture from a number of the men; we should have remained, if only a few of us. Moreover, I didn't have the courage or the vision to break our tie to the lake and—together with all the Cuban troops, or a pared-down selection—press on to places where we would not have been constantly tempted by the lake and its hope of a return in the event of failure.

Lastly, my farewell letter to Fidel played a role in my relations with the men in the final days; I could sense this, although the letter was completely objective. Just as had been the case many years ago, when I first arrived in the Sierra, the letter meant that the Cuban compañeros saw me as an outsider; now it was the same at the moment of departure [from the Congo]. There were some things that we no longer had in common, certain sentiments that I had tacitly or explicitly renounced but which each individual holds most sacred: his family, his surroundings and his

homeland. The letter that had been received so favorably in Cuba and abroad actually separated me from the combatants.

These psychological considerations might appear out of place in the analysis of a struggle that is virtually continental in scale. I maintain my faith in my concept of a nucleus; I was the leader of a group of Cubans, one company, no more; and my role was to be their real leader who would carry them to the victory that would hasten the development of a genuine people's army. But my peculiar situation transformed me at the same time into a soldier, a representative of a foreign power, an instructor of Cubans and Congolese, a strategist and high-flying politician in an unfamiliar setting, and a tiresomely repetitive Cato the Censor in my relations with the leaders of the revolution. By pulling on so many threads, I formed the Gordian knot that I didn't have the resolve to cut. Had I been a more authentic soldier, I might have had more influence in the other spheres of my complicated relationships. I have described how I reached the point of safeguarding the cadre (my own precious person) at the particularly disastrous moments in which I found myself, and how I didn't overcome subjectivity in the end.

I learned certain things in the Congo. These mistakes I will never make again, others I probably will make again; and I will commit new errors. I have come out of this with more faith than ever in the guerrilla struggle, and yet we failed. My responsibility is great; I will not forget this defeat or its most precious lessons.

What does the future hold in store for us in the Congo? Victory, of course, but it is some way off.

The liberation struggle against new-style colonial power inevitably presents extreme difficulties in Africa. In fact, there is not a single case that allows us to show its various phases all the way to victory; so-called Portuguese Guinea is an incomplete example of a well-conducted people's war, but it has been fought against colonialism; nor can Algeria be considered a useful model for us because France developed within its colonial oppression neocolonial forms that we might call atypical.

The Congo is the setting for the cruelest and most bitter liberation struggle and so a study of this experience will give us some useful ideas for the future.

Unlike Latin America, where the process of neocolonialism has developed amid violent class struggles and where the national bourgeoisie participated in the anti-imperialist struggle before its eventual capitulation, Africa presents a picture of a process planned by imperialism. Very few countries there have obtained their independence through armed struggle. On the whole, everything has happened with the smoothness of a well-oiled machine.

In effect, it is only the southern cone of Africa that remains officially colonized, and the general outcry against that system is likely to bring about its rapid demise, at least in the Portuguese colonies. The Union of South Africa presents different problems.

In the African liberation struggle, the advanced stages of the process are similar to current models of a people's war. The problem is how to root it more deeply, and this is where questions arise that I am unable to answer. I would simply like to outline a few points resulting from my feeble and fragmentary experience. If the liberation struggle is to be successful in the present conditions in Africa, it is essential to update some Marxist analytical schemas.

What is the primary contradiction of the epoch? If it is between the socialist and the imperialist countries, or between the imperialist countries and their working classes, the role of the so-called Third World will be significantly reduced. But there are more and more serious reasons to believe that the primary contradiction is between the exploiting and exploited nations. Here I cannot begin an attempt to demonstrate this point, and to show that it is not opposed to the characterization of the epoch as one of transition to socialism. It would lead us onto difficult side-roads and require a mountain of data and arguments. I will leave this as a hypothesis that has been suggested by practice.[3]

In this case, Africa will play an active and important role in this primary contradiction. Nevertheless, if we take the Third World as a whole to be an actor in this contradiction, at this present time in history, then we can see that there are gradations between countries and continents.

In summary, we can say that Latin America as a whole has reached a point at which the class struggle is intensifying and the national bourgeoisie has totally capitulated to the power of imperialism, so that in the short-term

historical future, the liberation struggle will be crowned by a revolution of a socialist character.[4]

Asia is witnessing the same process, although the framework is much more complicated as it includes colonized imperialist countries such as Japan, as well as important socialist countries like China, and puppets of imperialism as large and dangerous (because of elements of a former status) as India. But in countries that might be considered more typical, where a war of liberation might be victorious, the national bourgeoisies have not exhausted their role as opponents of imperialism, although it is important to realize that they are rapidly moving in that direction. These are countries that have recently achieved liberation, and which don't have the fictitious liberty that Latin America has enjoyed for more than 100 years; so it will take some time for the inevitability of revolution to become apparent there.

In Africa, especially in the part called "Black Africa" because of the color of people's skin, there is a long chain stretching from primitive communism to dots on the map where there are a proletariat and a developing bourgeoisie. Under the new imperialist plan, there is no contradiction of any kind between the national bourgeoisies and the neocolonial powers. Each individual country, when drafting its plan for the liberation struggle, must start by regarding as enemies not only the imperialists and the layers on which their strength is based (such as the surviving colonial armies and, more dangerous still, the colonial mentality of their officers), but all the *nouveau riche,* importers and emerging industrialists who are closely linked to monopoly capital in the form of bureaucratic capitalism.

Under these conditions, the class that struggles against foreign power is the petty bourgeoisie. But what is the petty bourgeoisie in the African countries? It is a layer which, having served imperialism or neocolonialism, has become aware of certain limitations imposed on its own development and its human dignity. This class sends its children to study in the more intelligent colonial countries, those that offer the most opportunities, or, in this new period, the socialist countries. Of course, viewed as the leading stratum of a people's war, this class is extremely weak. In the Congo, as I have said, the peasants are divided into an infinite variety of major or minor tribal groups, whose bonds become stronger as their territorial compass

becomes smaller. This can vary from certain large groups—I came to know the Katanga and the Kivu—which are bound together with ties akin to “nationality,” through to more compact territorial groups, right down to small tribal groups at village level.

The solidarity between villages belonging to the same group is very great, and the solidarity among members of the same village is even greater, although within the limited framework of the natural life I have described, at least for our zone. In other regions, they are forced to gather certain products of the bountiful Congolese nature to serve the capitalists: for example, resin, elephant tusks in an earlier period or palm nuts for oil. This gives rise to a different type of relation, which I have not examined in depth. At the other extreme, there are nuclei of a developing proletariat in areas where the Union Minière decided to run some of its processing operations in the Congo. At first, these workers were brought in by force because their natural environment meant they had no need to change the way they lived. Now it seems that, despite starvation wages (in European terms), this proletariat is not a rebellious element. Perhaps there is still nostalgia for the old life of freedom, but it has been tempted by a few of the comforts that civilization provides. I must apologize again for the superficiality of this analysis, which is based on fragmentary practical experience and poor general knowledge of the social question in the Congo.

In any case, what strategy should be pursued? Evidently there are points of conflict in the towns, significant inflation, recolonization with a marked discrimination not only by whites against blacks but now also by rich blacks against poor blacks, and a certain return to the villages by many people who had been drawn to the city lights. These sources of discontent may stir isolated revolts, but the only decisive force is the colonial army, which offers all the good perks and intervenes only to protect them or to develop them further.

The peasantry lives in absolute poverty, but it is not much worse than it was 10 years ago. Except in the war zones, the peasant feels no need to pick up a gun because objectively declining conditions of life make that course of action a vital necessity. Furthermore, it should be explained that, in order to evaluate the objective conditions properly, it is much less important to consider one people’s level in comparison to that of other peoples, than it is to consider it in comparison with itself. The poverty of our peasantry in

South America is real with respect to itself; exploitation is increasing, as are hunger and poverty. In many parts of the Congo, however, this is presumably not the case. All this gives some idea of how difficult it is to stir a country into revolt around largely economic slogans. I have already referred to the main demand of this kind in a people's war, and the obvious one is the demand for land. Tribal relations are one lever that is widely used, but you can't get very far with that in a war of liberation. I can't say whether it is useful or necessary to have recourse to it at an early stage, but obviously there can be no advance unless it leads toward destruction of the tribal concept. As long as this remains in place amid attempted advances, the evolving tribal group will tend to clash not with the army of the oppressors, but with the neighboring tribe. In the development of the struggle, tribes must unite in pursuit of a common objective, which is why it is so important to establish that objective and the party or the man who symbolizes it.

A very important factor in the development of the struggle is the universality that it is acquiring. Clearly imperialism scores a victory when there is a retreat in the popular struggle anywhere in the world; and by the same token, it suffers a defeat when a genuinely progressive government comes to power anywhere in the world. We should not think of countries as self-contained areas for the purpose of social analysis. Rather, we can say today that Latin America as a whole is a neocolonized continent where capitalist relations of production prevail, despite the numerous examples of feudal relations, and where a clearly popular, anti-imperialist (that is, anti-capitalist) struggle is, at the end of the day, a socialist struggle. Similarly, in the Congo or any other country of Africa, we must accept the possibility that new ideas about the world will develop that afford a glimpse of something entirely new, beyond the little local preserve for the hunting of game or the growing of crops for immediate consumption. The impact of socialist ideas must reach the broad masses in the countries of Africa, not as a transplant, but as an adaptation to new conditions. Moreover, it must offer a down-to-earth vision of major changes that can be, if not actually felt, then clearly imagined by the population.

For all this, what would be ideal would be to organize a party with a truly national base and real status among the masses, a party with solid and well-developed cadres. Such a party does not exist in the Congo. All the

Lumumbaist movements are vertical structures, with leaders of a certain intellectual level totally surrounded by capitulationist and accommodating petty-bourgeois cadres.

In the conditions of the Congo, a new party based on the teachings of Marxism and adapted to the new conditions should, at least initially, base itself on prestigious figures who are recognized as honest, genuinely representative of the new Congolese nationality, self-sacrificing and capable of commanding and binding people together. These imaginary men will come from the struggle.

Today Compañero Mulele is still there, doing underground work the details of which we have no knowledge. There may also be people operating in the eastern zone where the groundwork of the guerrilla army was first laid in the revolt against oppression, with experience with firearms and an intimate conviction of the possibilities which they afford. But this is a people without faith in its leaders, and without a party to lead it. The fundamental task at the present moment is therefore the development of a party to lead the revolution at the national level, with slogans linked to the people and with cadres it respects—a task which itself requires a capable, heroic and far-sighted leadership team. The link with the workers will be achieved later on. This is not to say that we deny the so-called worker-peasant alliance, which will actually emerge early on in an alliance of the highly backward peasantry with the ideology of the proletariat. Later, the industrial workers—who, under present conditions in the Congo, are privileged in their exploitation—will close ranks with the guerrilla movement as a result of the catalyzing effect of armed activity. Armed propaganda, in the Vietnamese sense, should be a fundamental task in the development of this whole process.

It is necessary to note again that the people’s war, a guerrilla war, is a mass struggle. We cannot accept the counterposition that is sometimes made between mass struggle and guerrilla warfare (ie, a select nuclei of armed combatants). This idea is equally false when espoused by dogmatic followers of a general strategy based on the predominance of the working class, and when guerrilla warfare is put forward as a mere instrument of struggle by the most dedicated groups to seize power from the exploiters. The main role of guerrilla warfare is to educate the masses in the possibility of victory and showing them, at the same time, the possibility of a new

future and the necessity of change to achieve that future in the process of the armed struggle of the entire people.[5]

Inevitably it will be a prolonged war. But what is important is not the ensuing process once the war has taken root in rural areas and spread to new areas, thereby causing fresh enemy defeats; what concerns us is to know how it can develop today. For although we are currently experiencing a moment of set-back and defeat, the basic conditions for armed struggle exist in this part of the Congo: a peasantry that has rebelled, a peasantry that has been defeated, abused and harassed but has tasted revolt; it has had an experience of armed struggle, it has weapons and it has lived through war.

Today the Congolese are divided into autonomous groups with local leaders, without a vision of a unified country, or even a vision of the Congo as a nation. For them, the nation is the surrounding tribes and this is why it is so important to organize the best combatants into a nucleus (even a single nucleus, made of steel), because the guerrilla force should not be increased by one man unless he makes a qualitative contribution. On this basis, a beginning can be made with military leaders present in the territory where the guerilla campaign is to be conducted. It will then grow by educating the people in the revolutionary struggle, passing through the different stages of history at breakneck speed. From the current primitivism (which in some cases in close to primitive communism), to slavery or to feudalism, it is necessary to move to the most advanced concepts. The people must gradually become armed, essentially through its own resources. It becomes educated through its own efforts. Let every weapon be a reward to the guerrilla combatant; let him receive it only when he carries out all the necessary tasks required for the maintenance of the people’s army; let the weapon be a confirmation of his state of grace as a people’s fighter. To accomplish this huge and patient task we will clearly have to begin by sweeping aside the present cadres; we should simply disregard them, and begin with a nucleus as small as necessary, as large as possible. In this way new leadership cadres will emerge, tempered through sacrifice and combat as they undergo death’s rigorous selection on the battlefield.

Given these conditions, it is essential that a far-sighted leader emerge, a self-sacrificing and prestigious leader who, operating inside the country, is an actor in the impetuous development of the conditions for revolution.

This great process of struggle will have to create the soldier, the cadre and the leader simultaneously because, strictly speaking, none exist today. The struggle will have to move from the countryside to the villages to the towns, first of all in small groups that do not require a rigid defense of territory. These groups will have to improve their technique of rapid concentration and dispersal and undergo a methodical apprenticeship in modern military technique and guerrilla warfare, constantly sowing the revolutionary seed through their example. This is the road to victory. The more rapidly capable and self-sacrificing leaders emerge who can in turn lead capable and self-sacrificing middle-level cadres, guiding the development of the people's army based on a rebellious peasantry, the sooner will victory be achieved.

The scale of the problems is enormous. We need to turn our attention to revolutionary theory and practice, to make a serious study of the methods, to find the most appropriate ways of linking the peasantry to the people's army and turning all this into a single force. A long but qualitatively irreversible stage of protracted warfare will then begin, through which other layers will be won over in remote regions and the proletariat of the industrial areas of the Congo will itself be incorporated. It is not possible to say how long this will take—only that it can be done. We are strongly assisted by the present conditions of humanity, the development of socialist ideas, and the cruelty of an enemy who always offers a negative countervision to the hopes placed in the people's army. After some years, victory will come.

I believe that Africa is important for imperialism, especially US imperialism, as a reserve. When the people's war develops in all its magnitude in the regions of Latin America, it will become difficult for it to keep exploiting on the same scale the great natural wealth and markets that are the basis of the power of imperialism. But if Africa meanwhile calmly develops its system of neocolonialism, with no great commotion, investments could be transferred there—this has already begun—as a way of ensuring the survival of imperialism. For that vast and immensely rich continent has hardly been tapped.

Within the framework of a global struggle, the strategy for Africa is to prevent the reserve bases of imperialism from remaining quiescent, and that is why each people must drive forward to the maximum its struggle for genuine liberation, as part of its duty within the great struggle of the

peoples of the world. And our obligation is to give consistent support to the movements that offer hope of a real and serious mobilization for victory.[6]

What will be our participation in all this? Perhaps we will send a nucleus of cadres chosen from among those who already have some experience in the Congo and have not undergone the collapse that I have described; perhaps we should send weapons, if the allies permit it; perhaps we should give financial aid and help in training cadres. But we must change one of the concepts that guided our revolutionary strategy to date. We have spoken of unconditional aid, and that is a mistake. Offering aid means taking a position—and that position is taken on the basis of certain analyses of the trustworthiness and effectiveness of a revolutionary movement in the struggle against imperialism, in the struggle for the liberation of a country. In order to be sure of such analyses, we have to know the movements in question better, and to do this we have to intervene more inside them. Aid should be conditional; if not we run the risk of the aid turning into the exact opposite of what we intend, becoming money that allows the lords of the revolution to enjoy princely holidays, and the *Freedom Fighters* to sacrifice and sell out their people and hold back the development of the revolution. If that happens, we turn ourselves into allies of imperialism. Nothing is cheaper for imperialism than to drop a few thousand dollars on the table at a conference of liberation movements in Africa. (I have no doubt that, if it does not already do this, it will in the future.) The distribution of the money then causes more conflicts, divisions and defeats than an army would inflict on the battlefield.

We must draw our conclusions from these real objective facts and condition our aid on the revolutionary conduct of the movements and their leaders. To replace colonialism with neocolonialism, or one group of neocolonialists with another group that does not look so bad, is not a correct revolutionary strategy.

Finally, if I were asked whether I think there is any figure in the Congo who could become a national leader, I would not be able to answer in the affirmative—leaving aside Mulele, whom I don’t know. The only man who has genuine qualities of a mass leader is, in my view, Kabila. The purest of revolutionaries cannot lead a revolution unless he has certain qualities of a leader, but a man who has qualities of a leader cannot, simply for that

reason, carry a revolution forward. It is essential to have revolutionary seriousness, an ideology that can be a guide to action, a spirit of sacrifice that accompanies one's actions. To date, Kabila has shown that he possesses none of these qualities. He is young and might change, but I will be so bold as to state here (in a text that probably will see the light of day only after many years have passed), that I have very great doubts about his ability to overcome his defects in the environment in which he operates. The other well-known Congolese leaders will all be swept away by events. New ones are probably today somewhere inside the country starting to write the real history of the liberation of the Congo.

January 1966

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1. This evaluation corresponds to Che Guevara's concept of the two dimensions of revolutionary struggle—military and political—and not just military, as is sometimes argued. Similarly, his observations about the role of the political commissar and others assigned to those roles are consistent with the value Che placed on the ethical and exemplary behavior required of the members of the revolutionary vanguard. See Che's essay, "Socialism and Man in Cuba" in *Che Guevara Reader* (Ocean Press).

2. Che was an avid reader throughout his life, including during his time in the Congo and as a guerrilla in Bolivia. He read Cuban and universal literature, as well as texts on history and politics, both general and specific to those two countries in particular. Che considered the conscious, critical study of philosophy (including but not restricted to Marxist writings) was an indispensable part of the education both of the vanguard and the people in general, but urged an avoidance of the traps of dogmatism, adaptation and philosophical toadyism as he expressed in a letter to Armando Hart, at the time organization secretary of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party, dated December 4, 1965.

His profound and systematic study of philosophy was based on a reading program organized historically and thematically, from the classics to the giants of dialectical materialism to modern-day philosophers. It included the classics of economic thought, Marx and Marxist thought, the subject of socialist transition, and also heterodox and capitalist thinkers and polemics. In this regard see the letter mentioning this study plan in *Self-Portrait,* by Ernesto Che Guevara, (Ocean Press, pp. 212-214).

3. An analysis of the various contradictions, in their fundamental forms, that characterized this historical stage can be found in Che's speeches in Geneva on March 25, 1964, and at the General Assembly of the United Nations on December 11, 1964. These contradictions, which Che believed should be viewed both in political and economic terms, were between the socialist countries and capitalist countries, between different capitalist countries, and the contradiction between the camp of the exploited countries and the exploiting countries. In this last case, as he had said at the Second

Economic Seminar of Afro-Asian Solidarity in Algeria, this meant both the struggle against imperialism in its colonial and neocolonial forms, as well as the struggle against the backwardness and poverty that result from its domination since “both are stages of the same road that lead to the creation of a new society that is both rich and just,” which would be a socialist society.

4. Latin America was always central to Che’s revolutionary thought and actions from his first trip on a motorbike through the continent as a medical student. For a comprehensive presentation of Che’s analysis of Latin America, see *The Awakening of Latin America,* (Ocean Press).

5. This is a synthesis of Che’s thinking about this method of struggle, a greater elaboration on which can be found in his works on guerrilla warfare already cited.

6. Taking into account the peculiarities of each of the exploited continents—Asia, Africa and Latin America—Che analyzes the place each people will take as part of the necessary strategy of global confrontation with colonialism and neocolonialism, which must be based on unity and solidarity through the practice of proletarian internationalism. See Che’s 1964 speech in Algeria and his “Message to the Tricontinental” (already cited). See *Che Guevara Reader* (Ocean Press).

APPENDIX 1

Glossary: Clarification of Swahili Names and Terms[1]

The majority of the words presented here are from the Swahili language and are geographical features or proper names. Swahili is a phonetical language, with pronunciation similar to Spanish.[2]

Abdallah: Cuban combatant, sergeant.

Achali: Cuban combatant, sergeant; volunteer in the rescue of the compañeros who had been left behind in the Congo.

Afendi: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Agano: Cuban combatant, sergeant.

Ahiri: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Aja: Cuban combatant, soldier; volunteer in the rescue of the compañeros who had been left behind in the Congo.

Ajili: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Akika: Cuban combatant, sergeant; platoon chief in the last of the mixed companies to be formed.

Alakre: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Albertville:[3] Industrial and mining city; port on Lake Tanganyika.[4] The base of operations for the repressive army.

Alfred: Congolese political commissar attached to the General Staff.

Almari: Cuban combatant, sergeant.

Aly: Cuban combatant; first captain; the officer in charge of the men in Kabimba almost the entire time.

Ami: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Amia: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Anga: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Angalia: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Anzali: Cuban combatant, corporal.

Anzurumi: Congolese colonel, head of the General Staff of the Second Brigade based in the Fizi area.

Arasili: Cuban combatant, soldier; volunteer in the rescue of the compañeros who had been left behind in the Congo.

Arobaini: Cuban combatant, soldier; wounded and evacuated prior to our departure.

Arobo: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Awirino: Cuban combatant, soldier; disappeared during a retreat.

Azi: Cuban combatant, lieutenant; commanded various combat groups.

Azima: Cuban combatant, lieutenant; second in command of Second Mixed Company.

Bahasa: Cuban combatant, soldier, died as a result of wounds received on October 24, 1965.

Bahati: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Banhir:[5] Cuban combatant, soldier.

Baraka: Small port on Lake Tanganyika on the road from Fizi to Uvira.

Bemba, Charles: Congolese combatant; worked at my side as political commissar without holding that rank in the Congolese army.

Bendera, Feston: Political commissar of a Congolese unit.

Bidalila: Congolese colonel; head of the First Brigade based in Uvira. Promoted to general.

Birulo: Insect in Swahili. For us it was a synonym for lice.

Bondo: Settlement on the shore of Lake Tanganyika.

Bujumbura: Capital of the Kingdom of Burundi.

Bukali:[6] Congolese food made from cassava flour that has been turned into a paste in boiling water.

Bukavu: Capital of Kivu province; population 35,000.

Calixte: Congolese commander, head of the Makungu front.

Changa: Cuban combatant, captain; in charge of the transportation of supplies and messages [across Lake Tanganyika] from Kigoma.

Chei:[7] Cuban combatant, soldier.

Compagnie: Rwandese combatant incorporated into our troop.

Danhusi: Cuban combatant, soldier; my aide during part of the struggle.

Dawa: Medicine in Swahili; magic ritual through which a combatant is protected against enemy bullets.

Duala: Cuban combatant, corporal.

Faume: Congolese combatant who headed a guerrilla unit in the Katenga zone; we never established contact with him.

Fizi: Small settlement near Lake Tanganyika and seat of the General Staff of the Second Brigade; crossroads.

François: Congolese commander who died in the same accident that took [Leonard] Mitoudini's life.

Freedom Fighters: Generic name used in English to designate members of revolutionary organizations in exile.

Front de Force-Front Bendera: A place fortified by the enemy near the Albertville-Lulimba highway where there is a hydroelectric power plant.

Gbenyé [, Christophe]: Self-designated president of the rebel Congo; as Minister of the Interior of the government of [Cyrille] Adoula he ordered the arrest of [Antoine] Gizenga.

Gizenga [, Antoine]: Former deputy prime minister of the Congo; imprisoned during epoch of [Moïse Kapenda] Tshombe;[8] he was freed after the coup by [Joseph Désiré] Mobutu.[9]

Hamsini: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Hindi: Cuban medical doctor.

Hukumu: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Huseini: Congolese commander of the Congolese troops at the Upper Base[10] and at the Lubondja Barrier.

Ila, Jean: Congolese commander, head of the troop quartered at Kalonda-Kibuyu.

Ilunga, Ernest: Congolese combatant; my Swahili teacher until he became seriously ill.

Ishirini: Cuban combatant, soldier; head of the group of volunteers for the rescue of the compañeros that remained in the Congo.

Israel: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Jungo:[11] Settlement on Lake Tanganyika south of the Lake Base [Kibamba].

Kabambare: Settlement on the road from Albertville to Stanleyville.[12] The zone was under the control of revolutionary forces for a long time.

Kabila [, Laurent Désiré]: Second vice-president of the Supreme Council of the Congolese Revolution of the Congo,[13] head of the Eastern Front.

Kabimba: Settlement on Lake Tanganyika occupied by the enemy. The southernmost point of our front was nearby.

Kaela: Settlement on Lake Tanganyika between Kazima and Kisoshi.

Kalonda-Kibuyu: Hamlet on the Katenga-Lulimba route where a Congolese guerrilla unit was quartered.

Kanyanja: Rwandese settlement on the high plain, located between Nganja and Front de Force.

Kanza [, Thomas]: Congolese politician; minister of foreign relations in Gbenyé's government.

Kapita: Political heads of a small Congolese village; the position is below that of chairman, the title given to the head of various groupings.

Karamba:[14] Geographic location between Baraka and Kazima.

Karim: Cuba combatant, lieutenant; political commissar.

Karume [, Sheik Abeid Amani]: President of Zanzibar, first vice-president of Tanzania.

Kasabuvabu, Emmanuel: Supply chief of the General Staff.

Kasai: Province of the Congo where [Pierre] Mulele operated; it has large diamond deposits.

Kasali: Congolese commander attached to the General Staff.

Kasambala: Cuban combatant, corporal.

Kasolelo-Makungu:[15] Location of Commander Calixte's camp.

Kasongo: River port in the Congo and highway interchange; there are revolutionary forces in this area.

Kasulu: Cuban medical doctor (of Haitian nationality) and French translator.

Katanga: The wealthiest and most industrialized of the provinces of the Congo; located to the south of our zone of operations.

Katenga: Town on the road between Albertville and Lulimba.

Kawawa [, Rashid Mfaume]: Second vice-president of Tanzania.

Kawawa: Cuban combatant, corporal, killed in the action at Front de Force.

Kazima: Town on Lake Tanganyika, the only area where there was a small flat piece of land between the mountains and the lake. It was occupied by the enemy to threaten the base.

Kent [, Sammy]: Political commissar, native of Kenya, attached to the General Staff.

Kibamba: Conventional name given to the place where the base on the Congolese side of Lake Tanganyika was established.

Kiliwe: Stream that flows into the Kimbi;[16] in that zone we suffered the surprise of October 24, 1965.

Kimba [, Évariste]: Short-lived Congolese prime minister; succeeded Tshombe.

Kimbi [Kiyimbi]: Tributary of the Congo River; its headwaters are in the Lake Tanganyika mountains.

Kisoshi: Settlement located between Rwandasi and Kaela, on the lakeshore.

Kisua: Cuban combatant, lieutenant; Aly's second-in-command in the Kabimba area.

Kivu: Congolese province and the northern part of our front.

Kiwe: In charge of information on the General Staff; journalism student.

Kumi: Cuban medical doctor.

Lambert: Lieutenant colonel; chief of operations of the Second Brigade.

Lubichako: Creek and settlement on the west side of the Lake Tanganyika mountains.

Lubondja: Settlement located between Lulimba and Fizi.

Lulimba: Town on the Albertville-Bukavu road; a branch road to Kabambare starts there.

Maffu: Cuban combatant, lieutenant; in charge of the group of Cubans that stayed with the Rwandans.

Maganga: Cuban combatant, sergeant.

Makambile, Jerome: Former provincial deputy of the Congolese National Movement.

Makungu: Settlement near Front de Force; it was no man's land until the last enemy offensive.

Marembo: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Massengo [, Ildephonse]: Chief of Staff of the Eastern Front; succeeded Mitoudidi.

Moulana: Mayor General; head of the Second Brigade based in Fizi.

Mbili: Cuban combatant; led many actions; head of the First Mixed Company.

Mbolo: Settlement on the Baraka-Uvira road on the coast of Lake Tanganyika.

Mitoudidi [, Léonard]: Chief of staff of the Eastern Front; died in a drowning accident.

Moja: Cuban combatant, commander, member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party; head of the Second Company as instructor of the Cuban officers.

Morogoro: Cuban surgeon.

Motumbo: Canoe, generally made from a tree trunk hollowed out with fire and a hatchet.

Muganga:[17] Swahili word used without differentiation to designate both Western medical doctors and native medicine men.

Mukundi: A zone in the Congo near the Albertville railroad line.

Mulele [, Pierre]: Former Lumumba minister; the first to rise up and remains in the Kasai zone.

Mundandi [, Joseph]:[18] Rwandan commander who led a group of Rwandans that operated in Front de Force.

Mustafa: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Mutchungo: Minister of public health of the Supreme Council of the Congolese Revolution; he was in the Congo until the end of operations.

Muteba [, Christophe]: Head of communications of the Congolese General Staff.

Muyumba [, Norbert]: Delegate of the CNL [National Liberation Council][19] in Tanzania; later he came back to the Congo to lead actions in the Mukundi zone.

Mwenga: Town on the Fizi-Bukavu highway.

Nabikumo:[20] Name of both a stream and a settlement between Lubondja and Nganja.

Nane: Cuban combatant, sergeant.

Nbagira: Minister of foreign relations of the Supreme Council of the Congolese Revolution; remained until the last moment in the Uvira zone and said he was willing to return.

Nganja:[21] Settlement on the high plain populated by Rwandese herders.

Ngoja, Andre: Congolese combatant, active in the Kabambare zone.

Ngenje: Cuban combatant, sergeant; named chief of the Lake Base at the end.

Nne: Cuban combatant, lieutenant; died in the action at Front de Force.

Nor-Katanga: Province of the Congo located south of our front.

Nyangi: Settlement near Front de Force; enemy spearhead.

Nyerere, Julius: President of Tanzania [1962-85].

Olenga [, Nicholas]: Congolese general, head of the Stanleyville front.

Ottu: Cuban combatant, corporal; withdrew due to illness before the end of the struggle.

Pascasa: Congolese colonel at Mulele’s front; died in Cairo in a dispute between revolutionaries.

Pombe: Distilled spirit made from fermenting of cassava and corn.

Pombo: Cuban combatant, lieutenant; head of the group of my aides.

Rabanini: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Rafael:[22] Our representative in Tanzania.

Rebokate: Cuban combatant, lieutenant.

Rivalta, Pablo: Our ambassador in Tanzania,

Rwandasi: A point on the coast of Lake Tanganyika 4 kilometers from Kibamba.

Saba: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Salumu: Congolese captain; in charge of the defense of the Kazima zone in the last days.

Sele: Settlement about 15 kilometers to the south of Kibamba from where we embarked on leaving the Congo.

Siki: Cuban combatant, commander, member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party; took charge of the responsibilities of a chief of staff.

Simba: Means “lion” in Swahili; title given to the combatants of the liberation army.

Singida: Cuban combatant, sergeant.

Sita: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Sitaini: Cuban combatant, soldier; withdrew due to illness.

Sitini: Cuban combatant, sergeant.

Siwa: Cuban combatant, lieutenant, second in command of the First Mixed Company.

Soumialot [, Gaston-Émile]: President of the Supreme Council of the Congolese Revolution.

Sultán: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Tano: Cuban combatant, soldier.

Tatu: Three in Swahili; my name in the Congo.

Tchamlesso [, Dihur Godefroid]: See “Tremendo Punto.”

Tembo: Means “elephant” in Swahili, the name used by Emilio Aragonés, member of the Central Committee of the Cuban Communist Party.

Thelathini: Cuban combatant; sergeant; killed in the Front de Force action.

Tom: Cuban combatant, soldier; the political commissar of the troop until the arrival of Karim.

“Tremendo Punto”: Nickname of Tchamlesso, member of Massengo’s General Staff in the last period; previously a representative in Tanzania.

Tuma: Cuban combatant, lieutenant, head of the transmissions group.

Tumaini: Cuban combatant, sergeant; my aide.

Uta: Cuban combatant, captain.

Uvira: Settlement located at the northern edge of Lake Tanganyika and the northern limit of our front.

Zakarias: Rwandese captain who led the troop of Rwandans in the absence of Mundandi.

Zombe: Congolese food made from cassava leaves.

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1. This glossary was prepared by Che Guevara as part of his manuscript for this book.

2. The spelling of many names and places in this manuscript (and the diary and notes that served as sources for the manuscript) often varies, partly due to differences in the spelling and pronunciation of Swahili. Therefore the editors have opted, as far as possible, to correct the spelling of both the names assumed by the Cuban combatants as well as those of geographic locations. Footnotes have been used to indicate where this has occurred.

In the case of the Swahili names of the Cuban combatants, various available sources have been compared and, where possible, a Swahili dictionary was consulted.

The names of geographic locations have also been checked with maps of the region, both current and from that era, and in addition Swahili phonetics has been taken into account. When differences have been found between the way the names are spelled in the text and the correct spelling, the correct spelling is indicated in a footnote the first time the name appears in the text.

3. Today Kalemie.

4. In the case of some geographical names, the spelling used in the original has been respected when it corresponds to that accepted then in Spanish even though today it has changed. That is the case of Tanganyika, Rwanda, Kenya, South Africa and Korea.

5. It has not been possible to identify the real name of this combatant; it is possible this is due to a typographical error in the original manuscript.

6. The correct spelling is *ugali*.

7. The name is presented as Chei or Chail referring to the combatant who was given the pseudonym Chen.

8. Moïse Kapenda Tshombe led the separatist movement of Katanga (a southeastern province of the Congo) initiated in 1959. On June 30, 1960, 11 days after independence and the installation of the

government of Patrice Lumumba, and with the support of the Mining Union of Katanga and Belgium, Tshombe declared the secession of Kananga, thereby creating his own government. A conflict began that escalated over the following months, marked by the presence of Belgian troops and secessionist actions, culminating with Joseph Kasavubu's betrayal of Lumumba and the assassination of Lumumba on January 17, 1961, in Elizabethville, the Katangan capital, with the participation of the interior minister of Tshombe's government. The years that followed were marked by imperialist maneuvers seeking the neocolonial domination of the country, the intervention of the United Nations, as well as the resistance and struggles of Lumumba's followers. In 1963, faced with the actions of the forces under the UN flag, the Katangan secessionists were forced to renounce their objectives, and Tshombe went into exile in Spain. But with the advance of the insurgents, who gained strength by the end of that year and continued to win victories in 1964, as well as the total withdrawal of the United Nations and the inability of Mobutu's army to contain the rebels, a transitional government was formed and with the consent of the United States, Tshombe became prime minister, so that his influence could be used in negotiations with the rebels. Tshombe remained in that post until October 13, 1965, when the transitional government's mandate ended by a decree from Kasavubu. Tshombe returned to Spain and died in Algeria in 1969.

9. Joseph Désiré Mobutu (adopted the name Mobutu Sese Seko after January 10, 1972) was an undercover agent of the Belgian special services and, from 1960, CIA collaborator. During his first week in power, Lumumba promoted him to colonel and chief of staff of the Congolese National Army. When parliament refused to remove Lumumba and the traitor Kasavubu, on September 29, 1960, Mobutu named a "technical cabinet," suspending parliament and ordering "communist ambassadors" to leave the country. Mobutu was one of those responsible for the assassination of Lumumba, and remained head of the army that, with Belgian and US support, and the participation of white mercenaries, fought against the revolutionary Lumumba forces. On November 25, 1965, he overthrew President Kasavubu and proclaimed himself president for a five-year term, although his dictatorship lasted more than three decades. A rebellion led by Laurent Désiré Kabila, head of the Alliance of Democratic Forces for the Liberation of Congo-Zaire, was initiated in December 1996 and in May 1997 succeeded in taking control of the Congo. On May 16, 1997, Mobutu left the country and went to Morocco, where he died on September 7 of the same year.

10. The Upper Base was situated at the geographic point known as Luluabourg. This and the so-called Lake Base at Kibamba are two important places in this narrative and are frequently mentioned in the text. In many places reference is made to either one simply as "the Base." For that reason, in those cases where this was considered necessary to avoid ambiguity, which base is being referred to is specified in brackets.

11. The correct spelling of this settlement is Yungu.

12. Today Kisangani.

13. The Supreme Council of the Congolese Revolution (CSRC) was formed at a conference of the National Liberation Council (CNL) held in Cairo between the beginning of April and the end of May in 1965 with the participation of the progressive African countries. The Supreme Council, whose founding is commemorated on May 27, had 15 members and three military zones. The president was Soumialot and the two vice-presidents were Mulele and Kabila. As part of this process of restructuring of the revolutionary movement, Gbenyé was named president of the revolutionary government, a position from which he was removed by Soumialot on August 5, 1965—an event Che mentions in this book—and Abdoulaye Yerodia Ndombasi was named president of the executive committee, charged with maintaining the revolutionary direction of the movement.

14. This place has not been found. From the information given about its location, it might be a place known as Kalamba.

15. Also appears as Kozolelo-Makungu.

16. The correct spelling of this river is Kiyimbi.

17. The correct spelling is *mganga.*

18. In various sources that have been consulted, he is referred to as Mundandi or Mudandi with no differentiation between the two, and he is described as belonging to the Tutsi ethnic group. Che used the first variant, Mundandi, which is how his name appears in this book.

19. This organization was founded on October 3, 1963, in Brazzaville, capital for the former French Congo, with the goal of creating a politico-military coordinating body of parties opposed to the Leopoldville government after President Kasavubu decreed the definitive dissolution of the parliament on September 30, 1963. Defining itself as following Lumumba's ideas and among its objectives, according to its declaration, the CNL was the creation of a "revolutionary nationalist people's government" as well as the destruction of "the imperialist enterprise of the United States so as to be able to follow the road of freedom and democracy." Its purpose was to lead actions to "overthrow the Adoula government and carry out the complete and effective decolonization of the Congo, which is dominated by the coalition of foreign powers." The Congolese National Movement —Lumumba and the Party of African Solidarity—converged in the CNL, along with other, smaller groups.

20. Appears as both Nabikumo and Nabikume without any differentiation.

21. The original manuscript refers to "Njanga," but this could be a typographical error, and the place being referred to is the one called Nganja. In various sources it is spelled Nganya, but we have preserved Che's spelling.

22. Oscar Fernández Padilla, at the time Cuba's deputy minister of the interior. He replaced Pablo Rivalta as head of the support group when he took over as head of the intelligence team of the Cuban embassy in Tanzania. He arrived in Dar es-Salaam on September 7, 1965, along with five Cuban communications specialists and their radio equipment.

APPENDIX 2

List of the Cuban Combatants in the Congo

The military ranks listed are those held by the combatants at the time they left for the Congo. During their time in the Congo, all of these Cubans were considered to be the same rank, that is, simply soldiers or combatants.

1. Abdala: Soldier, Luciano Paul González
2. Abdallah: Sergeant, Alipio del Sol Leal
3. Achali: Alcibíades Calderón Rodríguez
4. Adabu: Soldier, Dioscórides Romero Delgado
5. Afendi: Soldier, Roberto Rodríguez Moniel
6. Aga: Soldier, Eduardo Castillo Lora
7. Agano: Sergeant, Arquímedes Martínez Sauquet
8. Aguir: Soldier, Esmérido Parada Zamora
9. Ahili: Soldier, Dioscórides Mariño Castillo
10. Ahiri: Soldier, José Antonio Aguiar García
11. Aja: Soldier, Andrés A. Arteaga Martínez
12. Ajili: Soldier, Sandalio Lemus Báez
13. Akika: Sergeant, Herminio Betancourt Rodríguez
14. Akiki: Soldier, Roger Pimentel Ríos
15. Alakre: Soldier, Sinecio Prado Ferrera
16. Alau: Soldier, Lorenzo Espinosa García
17. Almari: Sergeant, Argelio Zamora Torriente
18. Aly: Captain Santiago Terry Rodríguez
19. Amba: Soldier, Luis Díaz Primero
20. Ami: Soldier, Ezequiel Jiménez Delgado

21. Amia: Soldier, José L. Torres Salazar
22. Ananane: Soldier, Mario Thompson Vega
23. Anasa: Gonzalo Sanabria Cárdenas
24. Anaza: Víctor Manuel Salas Semanat
25. Andika: Soldier, Vicente Yant Celestien
26. Anga: Soldier, Juan F. Aguilera Madrigal
27. Angalia: Soldier, Luis Monteagudo Arteaga
28. Ansa: Soldier, Moisés Delisle Mayet
29. Ansama: Corporal Arnaldo Domínguez Reyes
30. Ansurune: Captain Crisógenes Vinajera Hernández (Died at Front de Force, June 29, 1965.)
31. Anzali: Corporal Octavio Rojas Garniel
32. Arasili: Soldier, Virgilio Jiménez Rojas
33. Arobaini: Soldier, Salvador J. Escudero Pérez
34. Arobo: Soldier, Mariano García Rodríguez
35. Au: Soldier, Andrés J. Jardines Jardines
36. Awirino: Soldier, Francisco Semanat Carrión (Disappeared in the Congo.)
37. Azi: Lieutenant Israel Reyes Zayas
38. Azima: First Lieutenant Ramón Armas Fonseca
39. Badala: Corporal Bernardo Amelo Planas
40. Bahasa: Soldier, Orlando Puente Mayeta (Died in the Congo, October 26, 1965.)
41. Bahati: Soldier, Melanio Miranda López
42. Barafu: Soldier, Ismael Monteagudo Rojas
43. Changa: Captain Roberto Sánchez Barthelemí
44. Changa: Soldier, Domingo Pérez Mejías
45. Chapua: Soldier, Roberto Pérez Calzado (One of the combatants who became lost during the withdrawal and was later rescued.)
46. Chegue: Soldier, Tomás Rodríguez Fernández
47. Chembeu: Soldier, Eddy Espinosa Duarte

48. Chen (also appears as Chei and Chail): Soldier, Virgilio Montoya Muñoz
49. Chiba: Félix Hernández Elías
50. Chumi: Dr. Raúl Candevat Candevat
51. Chungu: Soldier, Luis Hechevarría Cintra
52. Danhusi: Soldier, Nicolás Savón Sayús
53. Doma: Sergeant, Arcadio Hernández Betancourt
54. Duala: Corporal Dionisio Madera Romero
55. Dufu: Sergeant, Armando A. Martínez Ferrer
56. Dukuduku: Soldier, Santos Duquesne García
57. Faada: Soldier, Antonio Pérez Sánchez
58. Falka: Soldier, Fernando Aldama Asmaris
59. Fara: Dr. Gregorio Herrera Guerra
60. Fizi: Dr. Diego Lagomosino Comesaña
61. Hamsini: Soldier, Constantino Pérez Méndez
62. Hanesa: Soldier, Osvaldo Izquierdo Estrinio
63. Hatari: Corporal Adalberto Fernández González
64. Hindi: Dr. Héctor Vera Acosta
65. Hukumu: Soldier, Rodovaldo Gundín Rodríguez
66. Ishirini: Soldier, Martín Chivás González
67. Isilay: Soldier, Elio H. Portuondo Turca
68. Israel: Sergeant, Carlos Caña Wilson
69. Kahama: Sergeant, Alberto Man Sullivan
70. Karatasi: Soldier, Arsenio Puentes González
71. Karim: Lieutenant José Antonio Palacio Ferrer
72. Kasambala: Corporal Roberto Chaveco Núñez
73. Kasulu: Dr. Adrián Sansaricq Laforet (Haitian doctor who died in 1966.)
74. Kawawa: Corporal Wagner Moro Pérez (Died at Front de Force, June 29, 1965.)
75. Kigulo: Soldier, Noelio Revé Robles

76. Kimbi: Anaesthetist Domingo Oliva
77. Kisua: Lieutenant Erasmo Videaux Robles
78. Kukula: Soldier, Augusto Ramírez Fortesa
79. Kumi: Dr. Rafael Zerquera Palacio
80. Maffu: Lieutenant Catalino Olachea de la Torre
81. Maganga: Sergeant, Ramón Muñoz Caballero
82. Maongeso: Soldier, Germán Ramírez Carrión
83. Marembo: Soldier, Isidro Peralta Sano
84. Masivizano: Soldier, Casiano Pons González
85. Mbili: Official José María Martínez Tamayo (Used the *nom de guerre* Papi in Bolivia with Che.)
86. Milton: Soldier, Jesús Álvarez Morejón
87. Moja: Commander Víctor Emilio Dreke Cruz
88. Morogoro: Dr. Octavio de la Concepción de la Predaja
89. Mustafa: Soldier, Conrado Morejón Ferrán
90. Nafimi: Rogelio de la Cruz Lafargues
91. Nane: Sergeant, Eduardo Torres Ferrer
92. Ngenje: Sergeant, Marcos A. Herrera Garrido
93. Nne: First Lieutenant Norberto Pío Pichardo (Died at Front de Force, June 29, 1965.)
94. Nyenyea: Soldier, Luis Calzado Hernández (One of the combatants who became lost during the withdrawal and was later rescued.)
95. Ottu: Corporal Santiago Parada Faurez
96. Paulu: Soldier, Emilio Mena Díaz
97. Pilau: Soldier, Daniel Cruz Hernández
98. Pombo: First Lieutenant Harry Villegas Tamayo (Fought with Che in Bolivia and was one of the three Cuban survivors of that mission.)
99. Rabanini: Soldier, Lucio Sánchez Rivero
100. Raúl: Soldier, Florentino Nogas Lescaille
101. Rebokate: Lieutenant Mario Armas Fonseca
102. Saba: Soldier, Pedro O. Ortiz Montalvo

103. Safi: Soldier, Vladimir Rubio Barreto
104. Sakumu: Soldier, Florentino Limendú Zulueta
105. Samani: Soldier, Wilfredo de Armas Álvarez
106. Samuel: Soldier, Fidencio Semanat Romero
107. Shellk: Soldier, Raumide Despaigne Isaac
108. Siki: Commander Oscar Fernández Mell
109. Singida: Sergeant, Manuel Savigne Medina
110. Sita: Soldier, Pablo B. Ortiz Montalvo
111. Sitaini: Soldier, Ángel Hernández Angulo (Withdrew due to ill health.)
112. Sitini-Natato: Sergeant, Giraldo Padilla Kindelán
113. Siwa: Lieutenant Víctor Schueg Colás
114. Suleman: Soldier, Cecilio Francisco Acea Torriente (One of the combatants who became lost during the withdrawal and was later rescued.)
115. Sultán: Soldier, Rafael Vaillant Osmil
116. Tamusini: Soldier, Domingo Pie Fiz
117. Tano: Soldier, Aldo García González
118. Tatu: Commander Ernesto Che Guevara de la Serna
119. Tembo: Captain Emilio Aragonés Navarro
120. Thelathini: Sergeant, Víctor M. Valle Ballester (Died at Front de Force, June 29, 1965.)
121. Tisa: Sergeant, Julián Morejón Gilbert
122. Tom: Soldier, Rafael Hernández Bustamante (Political commissar before Karim arrived.)
123. Tulio: Soldier, Tomás A. Escandón Carvajal
124. Tumaini: Sergeant, Carlos Coello (Died in Bolivia, 1967.)
125. Tumba (Mauro): Lieutenant Justo Rumbaut Hidalgo
126. Uta: Captain Aldo Margolles Dueñas
127. Víctor: Sergeant, Víctor Cañas William
128. Waziri: Soldier, Golván Marín Valdivia
129. Yolivos: Francisco Castillas Martínez

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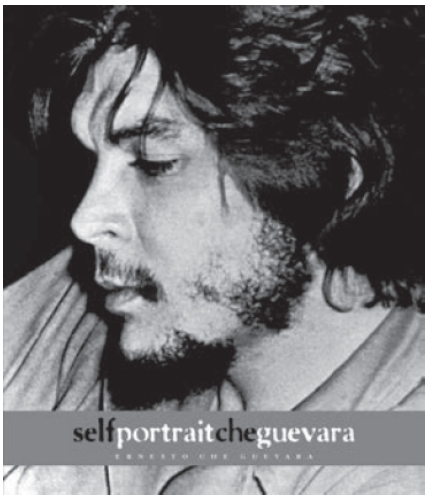

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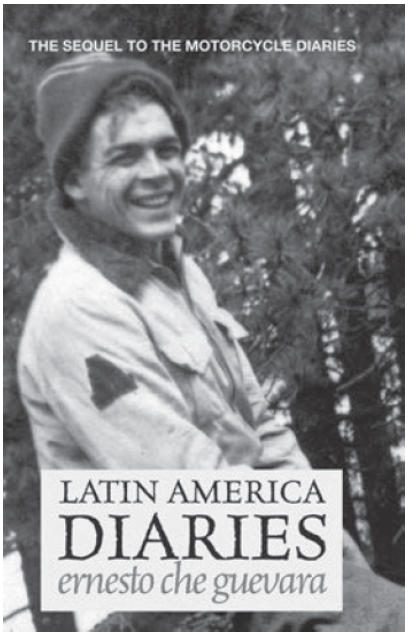

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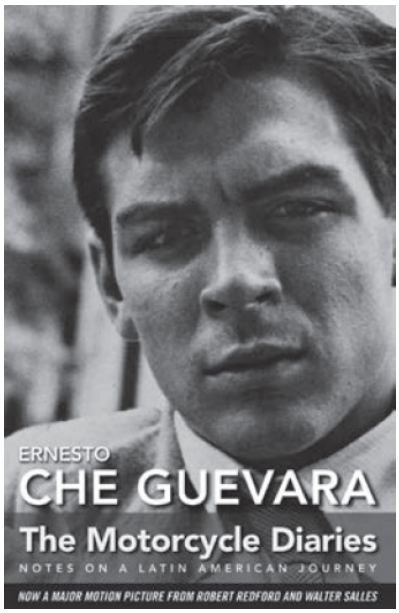
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